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The Rio Kid Western

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A Complete Bob Pryor Novel!

By TOM CURRY

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An Action Story

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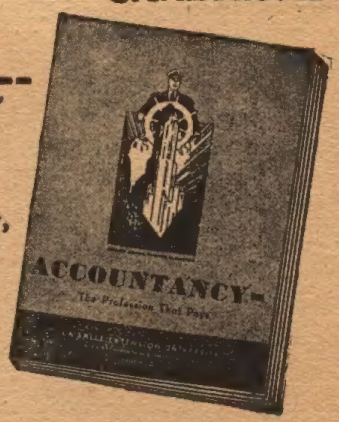

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The Rio Kid Western

Vol. XIV, No. 1 *A THRILLING PUBLICATION* February, 1947

A Complete Bob Pryor Frontier Action Novel

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By TOM CURRY

The Rio Kid and his pards ride to save the new city of Boise and its plans for progress from the greedy clutch of scheming hombres who deal in plunder and slaughter—and law guns echo above the grim smoke-pole thunder of murderous despoilers!..... 11

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A department conducted by America's foremost rodeo expert

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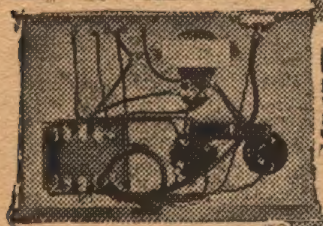

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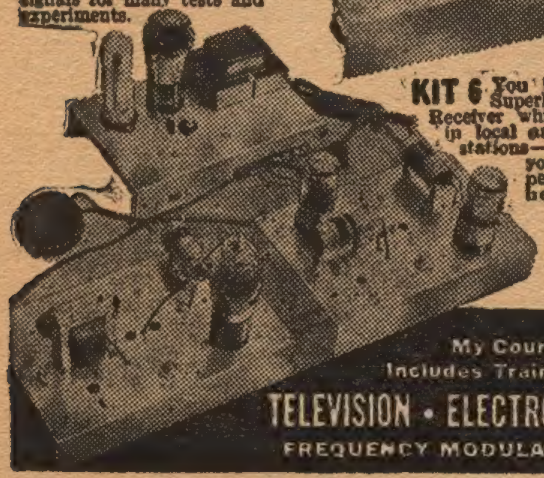

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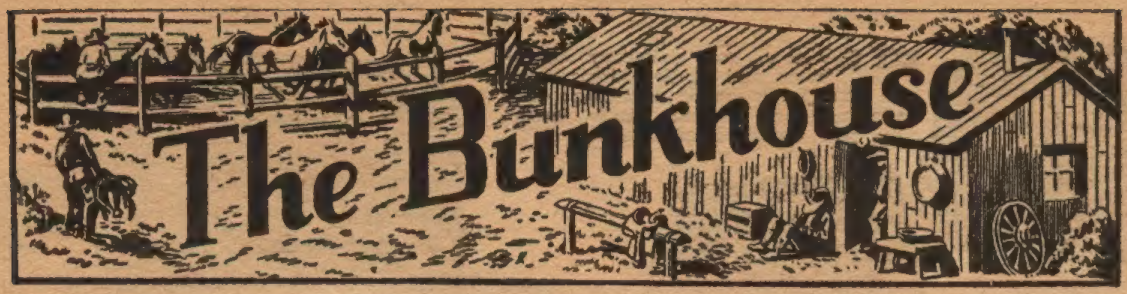

A Department for Readers Conducted by FOGHORN CLANCY

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I THINK it was one night during the winter of 1905-1906 that I happened to be in a restaurant in Forth Smith, Arkansas, which was owned and run by a fellow named Louis Berdelle. I had lived in Fort Smith, or made it my headquarters, for nearly two years, and was well acquainted with Berdelle.

The telephone rang, and in the course of the conversation with the party on the other end of the line Berdelle said: "I haven't anyone to send with them unless I can get a young fellow who is in here now to bring them," and turning to me he asked if I would deliver a bunch of sandwiches to a house about three blocks away for him. I told him that I would be glad to deliver the sandwiches for him, and he took the order.

The Daughter of Belle Starr

When the sandwiches were ready, he told me that they were to go to a tenant who lived in one of his houses, Pearl Starr. I had heard the name—who hadn't? Pearl Starr was the daughter of the notorious Belle Starr, a woman outlaw who made the headlines of the biggest newspapers and made a lot of history with her escapades. I was interested. I wouldn't have missed delivering those sandwiches for anything.

I knew where the house was and I was quickly on my way. I wanted to see this woman whose mother had gained such notoriety.

A gay party was going on when I arrived with the sandwiches. I turned them over to a good looking buxom woman whom I knew at once, because of the authority she exercised over those present, to be Pearl Starr. Despite the riotous life she was reputed to lead she did not look in the least dissipated.

I lingered for a few minutes, at first refused the generous tip she proffered for bringing the sandwiches, but when she insisted I accepted the money and went back to the restaurant feeling pretty much like a kid that has just come from a big circus performance, for I had had a new adventure, I had just met the daughter of the most notorious woman the Southwest ever knew.

A Great Woman Outlaw

Louis Berdelle was an old timer then. How he got the story of Belle Starr, I do not know, but there was not much business in the restaurant that night and Louis seemed to be in a talking mood. I stuck around, and whenever he seemed temporarily out of something to tell me about the great woman outlaw, I asked questions which would again loosen the floodgates of conversation in Louis, and he would tell me more.

After Louis had told me all he knew of the career of the noted woman bandit I was so intrigued that I followed it up by reading anything and everything I could find that had been written about her.

Belle Starr, whose career was unrivalled in outlaw history, was born Myra Belle Shirley, February 5th, 1848, in the chaotic period preceding the Civil War. She was the only daughter and the youngest child of John and Elizabeth Shirley, Southerners and violent partisans of the Confederate cause. Belle had two brothers, Preston and Edward. The father was variously a Missouri stock farmer and slave holder, a judge and proprietor of a hotel and tavern in Carthage.

Her childhood was spent in the No Man's Land of the brutal guerilla warfare between

(Continued on page 8)

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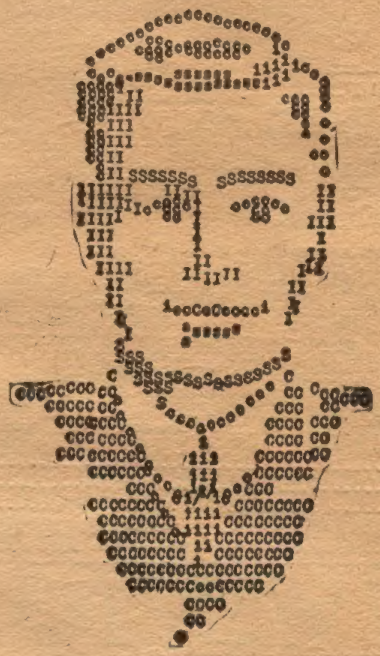

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THE BUNKHOUSE

(Continued from page 6)

abolitionist Kansas and pro-slavery Missouri. Like many of her generation in the old Southwest she was a rabid hater of the Yankees, almost before she learned to walk.

She was only 15 when William C. Quantrill and his raiders in 1863 sacked Lawrence, Kansas, killing nearly 200 men and burning and plundering the town. It was a reprisal, so Quantrill said, for the burning of homes and stores of rebel sympathizers in Osceola, Mo.

Fighting raged everywhere. The Carthage courthouse as well as the town itself was virtually destroyed in clashes between Federal troops and Confederate bushwhackers. Belle's brother, Edward, then 22, was a leader of the bushwhackers.

Major Enos, U.S.A., had had Belle brought into his headquarters and was trying to make her tell of the crimes committed by her brother and Quantrill, and after holding her for a couple of hours and being unable to get her to talk as he wished, he informed her that he had already sent a troop of calvary to bring her brother in.

She ran to her horse, and as the troop had left headquarters nearly two hours before on the thirty-five mile trip to the Shirley home, the Major did not try to restrain her. He was sure she would never be able to beat the troop to her residence and warn her brother.

He was amazed when he saw her taking her horse in jumps over the rail fences in her flight, and the troop of cavalry were also amazed when they reached the Shirley home, for it was Belle herself that opened the door for them, dropped a curtsy and said sweetly, "Convey my compliments to Major Enos, please, and tell him that Ed is already in the next County!"

Her Friends Kept Her Dates

Belle's triumph, however, was short lived. It was not long after that before the "dam' yankees," as they were called, got Ed. He was killed in battle at Sarcoxie, Mo., and from that time on his attractive sister who had really been reared and educated as a Southern lady, devoted all her time and her wits to the happy task of getting revenge. Her technique was good, too. Knowing all the highways and cowtrails in her part of Missouri, she would ride over them, and locate a Federal detachment. She would note its strength, flirt a bit with its C.O., make a date with him for the following evening, and then not keep the engagement.

But her friends, to whom she would relay the invitation, would keep it, and her address

(Continued on page 100)

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HERB HALL! WHY, DAD, HE'S THE MOVIE ARCHER!
DISCOVERED BENEATH MY BACKWOOD'S BEARD. AND AREN'T YOU PAUL LAURIE, THE FAMOUS HUNTER?
THANKS FOR THE LIFT WITH THAT BUCK. MAY I DRIVE YOU TO YOUR CAMP?
FINE! AND SAY... IT'S NEAR DINNER TIME. WHY NOT JOIN US?
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COME ALONG AND USE MINE
THIS IS THE BLADE FOR ME! SLICKEST SHAVE I'VE EVER HAD
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"Throw down, outlaws!" yelled the Rio Kid, as he and his comrades drove in to the rescue (CHAPTER II)

IDAHO RAIDERS

By TOM CURRY

The Rio Kid and his pards ride to save the new city of Boise and its plans for progress from the greedy clutch of scheming hombres who deal in plunder and slaughter!

CHAPTER I

Spoils

IN THE cabin, surrounding a stout man who evidently was a prisoner, stood several silent, rough-looking men who wore flat-crowned hats with a buzzard's feather stuck into the front of the band of each, as if it were a badge. Not so silent, another man—a tall fellow who appeared to be their leader—stood towering over the plump victim, beside the table in the center of the board floor.

A COMPLETE BOB PRYOR NOVEL

He was not wearing a flannel shirt open over a hairy chest as were his men, who also were garbed in either corduroy or leather trousers tucked into heavy calf boots with back tapes at their backs. Instead, he was clad in a dark coat, white shirt and black tie, elegant trousers, and shiny boots with slender toes. His black hat had been tossed on the table, revealing black hair, and leaving his deep-set, piercing eyes unshadowed.

Apparently he was not armed, but his men were walking arsenals. Some clutched sawed-off shotguns, and all were provided with Colt revolvers and knives.

The prosperous-looking prisoner's plump face grew apoplectic as he suddenly pounded on the table until the whisky bottles and glasses on it danced uneasily.

"Yuh can't get away with it, Yates Dorgan, yuh low-down cheat!" he howled at the tall man.

"Go on and yell, Hale," the man called Dorgan said calmly. "Nobody can hear you." He studied his fingernails, and his long nose twitched. His manner was smooth, as smooth as the ironed fawn skin of his fancy vest.

Hale gulped and, with an effort, lowered his voice.

"Now look, Dorgan," he said placatingly, "that block of land yuh're wantin' so bad is the most valuable chunk of real estate in Boise today. The city's up and comin', growin' fast. Why, that college they're goin' to start here has asked me the price I want for that land. I paid fifty thousand for it, nearly every cent I got for my share in the Bannack Mine!"

"Easy come, easy go," Dorgan remarked coolly.

"Did yuh say easy!" barked Hale. "Why, I worked like a dog for twelve years with a pick and shovel before I hit that ledge. Yuh call that easy?"

"Well, hard come, hard go, if you like, Hale," said Dorgan. "I tried ranching and mining for a while myself, but I don't care for that sort of work."

"I'll bet yuh don't!" growled Hale. "It's plain yuh're a friend of these buzzards here that grabbed me—the worst in the Territory! Mebbe yuh're one of 'em, in spite of yore smooth ways round the town."

THE tall man frowned, and again his long snout, which was turned to one side at its terminus, twitched like a rabbit's, in his annoyance.

Hale quickly saw that this was a situation which called for diplomacy. His voice took on a pleading note.

"Dorgan, I've got a wife and a couple of kids, and I want to see 'em took care of. Boise is a fine city, and I've been holdin' that land in the hope of makin' enough to give my boys good schoolin' and leave 'em well-fixed. But name yore ransom and I'll try to dig it up."

Dorgan extracted a white document from an inside pocket of his coat. He spread it out on the table and pushed a bottle of ink and a quill pen toward Hale.

"This is a quit-claim deed to the property," he informed. "Sign it and I'll let you go."

Hale blinked, seized the pen, and scrawled his signature on the indicated lines. Then he turned toward the door. But the moment Hale's back was to Dorgan, the tall man lunged with the ferocity of a striking tiger. And such was his trained speed that his slim hand was blurred. The long, narrow-bladed, razor-edged knife in that hand flashed in the lamplight as Dorgan drove it between Hale's ribs.

Hale flexed back, his face contorting in agony. But the twisting point slashed his heart.

Dorgan withdrew his knife, wiped it on Hale's shirt, and looked down on the prostrate figure.

"Nothing to worry over, boys," he said. "It's known that Hale likes to gamble some. It'll be laid to holdups who caught him with a roll. Wrap him in that blanket and carry him out to the wagon. You can dump him on Front Street, by the river."

His men quickly removed the body. There was a gloating look in Dorgan's eyes as he picked up the quit-claim deed.

Smokepole Thunder of Murderous Despoilers!

"Lady Luck has smiled at last!" he murmured.

Outside, in the pale light, lay Boise, capital of the huge Idaho Territory, the biggest town of the area. It was situated on the river of the same name and was the trade center of the rich valley with its prosperous ranches. It was surrounded by hills, and northward lay the mines and the forests which fed wealth into the settlement.

Dorgan turned out the lamp in the isolated shack as he watched his men drive off with his victim's body. The killing of Hale, the misery he had brought on the man's family, did not bother Dorgan. It was but an incident in the furthering of his own career.

Dorgan mounted his black horse and rode to the city. Two miles below it lay the military barracks, one of the line of posts built to guard the Overland Trail against marauding savages.

Wood from the great mountain forests, stone and brick had been used in building Boise, as more substantial structures took the place of the first tents and crude shacks. For it had soon become plain that the town would be an important center.

It was late at night now, but there were lights in saloons and other places, and music reached Dorgan's ears. Silhouetted against the sky stood a large, carved wooden horse, symbol of a livery stable.

BOB PRYOR

There were plenty of gambling parlors and other palaces of entertainment in Boise, for cowboys in for a spree off the range, miners who had drifted down from the northern diggings, and Overland Trail drivers demanded rough amusements. Colored lights gave a lurid touch to the crowds who filled the streets—cowmen in big hats, chaps and spurred boots, miners in red shirts and stagged pants, dandies in tall hats and frilled shirts, with gold-headed canes in their gloved hands and

their women companions, elegantly attired in silks, satins and jewels. All the men went armed, and many of the women in entertainment circles carried pistols or knives in hidden pockets, ready for instant use.

Questionable citizens always flocked first to a new spot, but now had come a more sober element, traders and business men, ranchers, all with their wives and growing children. These would demand law and order, safe streets, and schools. But as usually was the case in such settlements, the better people of Boise would have to run out those who had seized control before law could reign.

Dorgan contemplated the city.

"I'll own you yet!" he promised himself.

HAD he been psychic, he would have known that at that moment, riding the hills not a great distance away from the city he coveted, three men who would prove a thorn in his side, in an attempt to spike his ambitions, were heading directly for Boise.

One of them was Captain Robert Pryor who, since the close of the Civil War, had become known all over the Frontier, from Border to Border, as the Rio Kid, a man who rode now only to avenge wrongs and injustice wherever they might be found.

Riding beside him was Albert Sieber, a scout who had earned distinction in the war before he had come west; and, bringing up the rear was a young Mexican, Celestino Mireles, who for some time now had been the Rio Kid's constant companion of the trails.

"Lucky yuh took note of that cracked hoss shoe, Al," the Rio Kid remarked, when they had ridden for some time in silence, "or we'd never have been able to trail them rascals in this maze."

Al Sieber grunted. The night before he had been held up and robbed, and it was such a sore point with him that he refused to comment. He merely touched the bruise on his temple, one which ran up into his tow hair.

The attack had occurred after the three had left the ranch of a man named Dan Faber where they had sold a bunch of mustangs they had gathered in the hills further south. They had stopped at a wayside saloon called the First and Last Chance. There Sieber had stepped out alone for a moment for a breath of fresh air. He had been set upon and his money had been taken.

But before his assailants had struck him down, he had noted one of the bandit horses, had seen enough so that he could later locate a hoofprint in the soft earth nearby. A shoe on the mount's left forehoof had a Y-shaped crack in it, and by this small clue the trained trackers had picked up the sign, and had stuck to it, furious at the bold effrontery of the robbers. They were now bent on revenge, on the recovery of Sieber's profits, and the trail had led them this far toward Boise.

Now the three were traveling a steep trail through the hills overlooking the creek valley, and the city.

Respecting Sieber's feelings, the Rio Kid made no further comment as he sat his saddle with the ease of one born to it. He made a striking figure, with his clothing and equipment well-kept, for he had a passion for neatness which had been accentuated by his years as an officer in the Union Cavalry. During that time he had scouted for Sheridan, Custer, Sherman and Grant, and had risen to captain's rank.

His smooth, sun-tanned face glowed with youth and health. Broad of shoulder, his body tapered to a narrow waist where were strapped his Army Colts, with shells filling the belt loops. Hidden inside his shirt were two more weapons, as hide-out guns.

He gave an impression of military precision, even to the clothing he wore—whipcord trousers with a blue stripe down the sides, tucked into black Army boots with silver spurs attached, blue shirt, and a cavalry Stetson on his handsome head. Close-clipped, crisp chestnut hair showed under the brim.

From the Rio Grande to Canada, from Kansas cowtowns to California, men knew the Rio Kid as a square-shooter, a man to ride the river with. Danger was meat and drink to him, and his steady blue eyes, with their keen, trained scout's vision, showed his courage.

The dun with the black stripe down the back which he bestrode, was another companion of the trails, Saber. The mount "of the breed that never dies" did not look fast, but he could outrun anything on four legs. On the dun, Captain Pryor had led his company against Jeb Stuart's crack

The Rio Kid's slug tore into the bearded gunslinger's shoulder, doubling him up (CHAPTER XI)

cavalry, and on other important occasions. In a scrap, Saber was invaluable, for he fought with his rider, with equine fury. He was in his element when he smelled powdersmoke, heard the clang of battle. Then his mirled eye would roll challengingly, as it always did when he was wrought up.

Albert Sieber, about Pryor's age, had come from Germany, brought to the land of promise by his parents. He had fought in the Civil War at Gettysburg and in other great battles. Then, following the same restless urge for adventure as the Rio Kid, he had come West, but as yet he had not established the reputation he would later, as the greatest scout among the Apaches, in the Southwest.

His hair and mustache were sun-bleached, his nose was big, and his eyes deep-set and keen, with wrinkles radiating from their corners. His heavy jaw showed his dogged determination, and his high courage. His stalwart body was clad in fringed buckskin, and he wore a sandy Stetson and oiled boots.

CELESTINO MIRELES, the slim Mexican in steeple sombrero and a velvet suit, had a thin face. He had black hair, an eagle-beak nose, liquid dark eyes, and high cheekbones. The wide red sash at his waist held a pistol, and a long knife with which he was most expert. Snatched from death on the Mexican Border by the Rio Kid, shortly after the end of the war, Celestino had from then on followed Bob Pryor, whom he called his "General," wherever danger called.

He rode a beautiful gelding, a golden-hided creature with flaxen mane and tail, his latest acquisition in trade. Mireles could not resist horse-trading, and the Rio Kid had never known him to come off second best in a swap.

"Plenty of places for a robbers' roost in these mountains," Sieber finally remarked, after another long silence.

His shrewd eyes narrowed as they sought the dark heights, with white, yellow and knobby pine, mountain ash, and other trees clothing the slopes. Masses of elderberry bushes in blossom stood out snow-white against the background. Below grew thick, nutritious grasses, to support cattle. The fields were dotted with columbine and syringa, lupine and balsam, and sego lilies that found root in the rich, sandy loam. Mountains loomed to the west, and to the north.

The Boise Valley was sixty miles long, and from two to ten miles wide, a green paradise in the stark wilderness, nearly three thousand miles above sea level as it was, and so admirably protected that its climate was equable. Redrock Creek, cutting its way through to its mother stream, made a narrower but rich arm to the valley, and through its gap ran the road northward to the gold mines, as well as a branch trail to the Square F—Dan Faber's spread—and other ranches. Cattle and horses had been driven from Utah and Oregon to stock the range.

Far south lay the vast tableland of the Snake River, but the city of Boise was out of sight now. Here and there huge rock pinnacles reached gaunt fingers to the sky, or a colored clay bluff broke the vegetation. There was no sign of human habitation.

The Rio Kid pulled his gaze from the panorama, and glanced at his two companions.

"Let's cool off a while and give the hosses a rest," he suggested.

They pulled off the rocky trail, and sat on flat rocks near a foamy little rill which came from the mountain and flowed through the valley into the creek. It was noon and they were hungry from their ride, so they set to on the cold food from their saddle-bags.

CHAPTER II

Outlaws' Way

AFTER a cold meal and a smoke, the three riders in the Idaho highlands pushed on.

Some miles still higher in the mountainous country, they lost the Y-shaped horse track, though. They turned back, hunting along the trail, and at last the Rio Kid found a trace up a steep slope. Bushes hid it, and the sign was none too clear, but they managed to

locate the telltale Y crack about a hundred yards up the winding hillside.

"This is it," growled Sieber.

"No doubt." Pryor nodded.

He glanced up. The peak of the mountain above them loomed into the sky, forbidding in aspect. There were parks, saddles between heights, shelflike levels. In this maze must be hundreds of good spots for a bivouac.

As he stared, he saw a flock of birds veer suddenly from a dip in a ridge, perhaps a mile away.

CELESTINO MIRELES

"Somebody up there," he declared. "But they'll see us if we go much farther, and a bunch like that'll shore have guards watchin'. We'll wait till dark."

They went into camp in a dense grove of pines, and dozed through the afternoon.

About ten o'clock that night, the Rio Kid and Al Sieber finally reached a vantage point from which they could spy on the outlaw camp. A mile away, Mireles guarded their mounts. Sieber and Pryor had blacked their faces and hands, and had left behind anything which might rustle or clink and so betray them. Each scout had discarded his cartridge belts, heavy riding boots and hat, and had bound his hair with his kerchief.

The outlaws had armed guards all about their stronghold, so it had taken the utmost caution and skill to reach the low bluff on which the Rio Kid and Sieber were flattened, silent as the rocks. Just below them was a natural amphitheatre where rock and canvas shelters had been thrown up. In it also were bales of equipment and food under tarpaulins. Smoke from fires would be dissipated by overhanging walls.

The Rio Kid and Sieber spied forty men in the robbers' roost, lounging around playing cards, drinking from flasks, or dozing. They were bearded toughs, in flannel shirts and dirty leather or corduroy pants, and most of them wore big calf boots that had black tapes up the back. The Rio Kid took particular note of the flat-crowned hats they wore. Many of them were ornamented with a black feather.

He picked out the man who apparently was the leader, a big fellow with black whiskers and gleaming eyes. He could hear the harsh voices of some of the men call him "Jake," while others called him "Bannack."

As the scouts watched, there was a stir off to one side, and a sentry called in. More of the gang were approaching, so the hideout could be reached by other routes than the hidden trail the two scouts had discovered.

Men appeared, and reported to "Bannack Jake."

"Got sixty head of mustangs and a hundred beefs, Jake," they heard one man say. "Faber stock. We run it off, all right, but we had to shoot a waddy who come along. Faber just bought a bunch of fresh hosses, so they're good ones."

So already thieves had picked up some of the animals the Rio Kid and Sieber had sold Faber!

The two scouts heard little more, though, for it was late now, and the outlaws began rolling in their blankets to sleep. The Rio Kid touched Sieber's arm and they wormed off through the woods. An hour later they rejoined Mireles.

"It's too big a gang for us to tackle alone," opined Sieber. "But I'll bet they've got my money."

"Dan Faber ought to be interested," said the Rio Kid. "They're raidin' his range. It's a tough outfit, and they're organized under that Bannack Jake hombre. That black buzzard feather in their hats looks like it's a badge, don't it? They

don't seem like the usual passel of rustlers either."

They knew that they could not move with any surety in unfamiliar country, in the darkness, and it was a good many miles to Faber's Square F. So, hidden in dense bush, near a stream, they slept till the dawn roused them. In the fresh gray light they washed their faces, then had water and jerked beef, and started down the trail, alert for signs of the outlaws.

"Watch it, boys!" warned the Rio Kid suddenly. "Some of 'em are comin' down!"

They hid themselves, each keeping a hand over his horse's muzzle. A dozen of the rustlers, well armed, rode past them, headed toward the road to the gold fields.

WHEN the outlaws had ridden on, the watching men followed, careful to keep out of sight and hearing. But they were close enough to see when the outlaws reached the road connecting the goldfields country with Boise. Then they disappeared from view. The Rio Kid and his friends were at a standstill, unless they wished to make a wide detour through the rocky woods.

"Wonder what they're up to now?" asked Sieber.

They soon found out. It was a warm, lovely day, and the sun shone brightly on the brown, winding road. After a time a man on a black horse came riding along toward the hidden outlaws. When he was abreast of them, they sprang out. Two seized the black's bridle, while others brandished pistols and shotguns. The startled victim raised his hands over his head.

"Lew Mills, huh!" the Rio Kid and his companions heard an outlaw's harsh voice gloat. "Welcome! We heard about yore luck!"

Young Mills faced his fate courageously, but plainly it was not easy to stare into Colt and shotgun muzzles, with the brutal faces of the holdup men behind them.

And it also flashed across his mind to wonder how these outlaws knew that he had slaved in the mines for nearly a year, and that only the week before had made a decent strike. The nuggets and dust in the canvas money-belt snugged around his waist now were worth about three thousand dollars.

Still there was nothing to do but obey the commands of his captors. Robberies and killings were common enough in such wild country, but there was a chance he might escape death by handing over his gold.

"Huh, he's got quite a load," declared a stocky, bearded robber, who held a pistol in his left hand while he felt under Mills' shirt with his right. "Plump rascal, ain't he?"

The laughter of the highwaymen was not pleasant.

Lew Mills was not fat but he was strong-muscled, a big Pennsylvania youth. His back hair had a tendency to curl about his ears, but he had shaved off his beard before heading for Boise. He had intended to send his gold back home, to Pennsylvania. On a farm near his parents' home was a girl who had promised to wait for him until he had made his fortune.

His brown eyes were wide, but his lips were tight as they lifted his money-belt. Still he could only remain quiet, for his pistol had been snatched from its holster when he had been stopped. But his mind jumped from thought to thought. They were vicious devils, he knew, with no pity in them. He had seen men in the north of Idaho who dressed much as these robbers did, smugglers who ran contraband across the Border. But a brilliant new law organization called the Northwest Mounted Police had driven them and other lawless men from Canada.

Mills tried to impress the features of these outlaw thieves on his brain, so that he could describe them to the authorities in Boise—if he got a chance.

"Ain't a bad hoss he's got, either," observed a lanky holdup man, who had a tobacco cud bulging his bearded cheek.

Suddenly Lew Mills realized they were going to kill him. That would be much the safest way for them to dispose of a victim. And it was too late for him to fight!

"Let's have a little sport," suggested the stocky robber, who seemed to be in command. "Tie his hands and we'll hang him by the ankles to that big pine over there. He'll make a fine target for practisin'."

The young miner tried to fight, but rough hands pulled him from his saddle. They beat him down with gun barrels, tied his hands behind him, and dragged

him toward a tall pine where they meant to toss a lariat over a limb, hoist him up, and fire away.

When three men suddenly broke out of a thicket and dashed in, Mills could only believe them more of the robbers. But swift hope leaped into his eyes as one of the three, a handsome fellow with blue eyes and a smooth bronzed face, flourished a Colt revolver and yelled:

"Throw down, outlaws!"

With him were a lean Mexican carrying a knife in one hand and a pistol in the other, and a stocky man, with a big nose and sun-bleached hair and mustache, who wielded a sawed-off shotgun.

The startled outlaws whirled from Mills to face the challenge. One tried for the man who had ordered them to surrender, but the man's Colt banged and the outlaw fell back, screaming from a body wound.

THE shotgun roared at close range, and Lew Mills, abruptly released by his captors, threw himself on the ground. Buckshot cut the bandits, then the Mexican, teeth gleaming, knife flashing in the sunlight, drove in. The robbers, still on their feet, broke and ran, seeking the protection of the woods, of rocks, anything for cover. Bullets sent after them by the three rescuers kept them hopping, yelling.

The Mexican cut Mills' wrists free and the young miner ran for his horse.

"Ride, young feller!" sang out the man in the Army rig, standing with booted feet spread wide at the edge of the road, working his pistols.

The Mexican dashed away and came back with three saddled horses. The man with the shotgun let go with the second barrel.

Mills needed no urging to ride at top speed toward the city. In moments the three who had saved his life had hit leather and were galloping after him, their guns talking menacingly.

"I'm sure grateful to you, mister," sang out Mills, as the swift dun overtook his black.

"Save yore wind for ridin'!" the man in Army blue cried. "There's an army of 'em up above!"

The Rio Kid rammed his Colt into his assailant's middle (CHAPTER VI)

They galloped on until they were some miles beyond the spot where Mills had been waylaid. Then the handsome young rider slowed his dun mount to speak to Lew Mills.

"Yuh're a miner, ain't yuh? What's yore handle?"

"Lew Mills. Been workin' in the mines near Bannack lately, and was on my way to Boise. Wish I could tell you how I feel about your saving me. They meant to make a sieve of me."

"We heard 'em. You savvy 'em?"

"I've seen fellers like 'em, up north. Smugglers, they say. The Canadian Mounted Police chased 'em, I've heard."

"Mebbe they've holed up in these parts, and are makin' a livin' robbin' travelers and local ranchers," said the man on the dun. "I'm Bob Pryor, but most folks call me the Rio Kid. This is Al Sieber, and Celestino Mireles, pards of mine. We had some truck with them thieves ourselves, and happened to be close enough to give yuh a hand."

Mills was greatly impressed by the Rio Kid and his two partners. The way they had ripped into the outlaws had been extremely efficient, and their bravery was unquestioned. Crack shots, cool in a fight against odds, they were heroes to Mills. He had lost his gold, but that seemed inconsequential now that he had just faced violent death.

"Yuh're safe enough now, I reckon," the Rio Kid told him, when they had ridden on for another half hour. "Yuh'll be in Boise before noon. We're leavin' yuh here."

"Won't you ride to town with me?" asked Mills.

"No—we've got business the other way. Luck to yuh."

They rode off, with a wave of their hands at the disappointed Mills. He watched them as they took a trail which led to the creek, a tributary of the Boise River. There were ranches up the Redrock. Perhaps, he thought, they were bound for one of them.

But the man in Army blue didn't look like a common puncher, nor would he be dressed so if he were the owner of a big outfit. The man who called himself the Rio Kid fired the imagination of Lew Mills, who decided that he would learn about his benefactor as soon as possible.

CHAPTER III

The Way of a Maid

LEW MILLS kept on the highway and did reach Boise before noon. In the golden summer sunshine, the city bustled with commerce, ranchers and cowboys off the range, miners from the north, tradesmen, and others. On the streets, housewives in bustled, sweeping dresses, and farmers and stockmen, moved about. There were wagons and saddle horses, fine equipages, and blue-clad soldiers from the post downriver. In his brown corduroy pants, thrust into miner's boots, flannel shirt open at the throat, and brown felt hat, Mills fitted into the picture, all right.

He had only small change left in his pockets, and felt deeply depressed as he walked his lathered black horse toward the center of the city. He was sure there would be letters from Alzina, the girl from home, awaiting his call at the post office.

He was disappointed at receiving only one. He went outside, to be alone, and opened it. He read:

Dear Lewis:

I find it hard to write this letter, but I am sure you will understand. Peter Kratz and I were married Sunday in Lancaster. So of course our engagement, if you wish to call it such, is no longer. . . .

Mills' eyes blurred and he gulped hard. For a long time now he had counted on Alzina, waiting back home for him. She had been a symbol of the life he loved, the settled existence he had left to make the long trip across plains and mountains to seek gold—for her.

He crumpled the letter in his strong, callused hand, and began to walk aimlessly, almost unseeingly, along the street. Nature smiled, but Lew Mills was blind to everything but his own grief. He was hardly aware of the mountains which loomed in the distance, or of the buildings he passed—saloons and stores, livery stables, the courthouse of the Territorial capital. Or of the painted sign across from

City Hall which read:

THE IDAHO STATESMAN

Moving toward the river he passed the Capital Hotel, the First National Bank—State Street, Front Street—and then the river was at his feet and he was staring at the water. But it gave him no comfort, so he idly wandered back to the main street where he slouched down on a wooden bench, looking at the bare earth where boots of passersby had beaten a path by the Capital Hotel.

He did not even see the three riders who approached, the same three who only a short time before had saved him from painful and ignominious death.

They had ridden out to Dan Faber's Square F on Redrock Creek, after leaving Lew Mills, only to be told that Faber was in Boise on business. They had ridden then to the capital at once, to hunt the rancher, the one man they knew and could trust in these unfamiliar surroundings. The Square F foreman had said they would find Faber at the Capital Hotel.

Now as they neared it, the first familiar person they saw was the young miner they had rescued.

"There's that younker we give a hand to this mornin'," Al Sieber remarked, nodding toward Mills.

The Rio Kid nodded also.

"Looks like he'd lost his last friend, instead of just his purse," he said.

He sang out to Mills and grinned as the young miner looked up with a start. Lew's face brightened a bit as he recognized the trio. He jumped up and came toward them.

The Rio Kid was remembering that Mills had been robbed.

"Mebbe he hasn't even got the price of a meal left," he thought as he pulled up the dun. "Have you eaten yet, Mills?" he asked.

"Oh, I ain't hungry," the young miner said, and the Rio Kid could see his woebegone look plainly now.

"Come on and tag along with us," the Rio Kid invited. "When we've finished our business, we'll have a drink and a bite."

Lew Mills leaped at the offer. In his mental state company would be a comfort.

"What's up?" he asked.

The three riders had dismounted beside the big ornate hotel. Sieber and Pryor left the horses with Mireles, but beckoned Lew Mills to come along with them.

"We're goin' to see a rancher named Faber," he said. "We aim to spike the game of them outlaws who hit you."

"I'm with you on that," Mills said grimly.

"Yuh shouldn't feel too bad about losin' yore gold, Lew," went on the Rio Kid. "We may be able to get it back for yuh."

"It ain't only the gold," Lew Mills said, with a heavy sigh.

"What else, then?"

MILLS hesitated. But instinctively he trusted the Rio Kid.

"Well," he confessed, in a low voice, "I found a letter waitin' for me at the post office. A girl back East I thought a lot of, wrote me she's hitched to another feller."

"I savvy." The Rio Kid nodded sympathetically. "Yuh've shore had a tough day, Lew."

They crossed a wide veranda, where men and women sat in rocking chairs overlooking the lawn and avenue, and entered the lobby. Thick carpets covered the floors, and there were fine furnishings which had been brought to the capital by wagon teams. Through an open door they could see snowy-clothed tables with silver service gleaming in the main dining room.

"There's Faber, talkin' to a feller over by the wall," said the sharp-eyed Sieber. "Looks like a perfessor."

Faber was a big, wide-faced, clear-eyed cattleman of about forty. He had steady blue eyes and reddish hair. He wore range clothing, and his big Stetson lay on the floor near the leather armchair in which he sat.

As Sieber had observed, the middle-aged, heavy gentleman talking to Faber had the aspect of a professor. He had kind eyes behind thick-lensed, silver-rimmed spectacles, and wore a clipped goatee the color of his sparse light hair. He was dressed conservatively in black broadcloth, with a white shirt and flowing tie, but did not give the impression that he was clothes-conscious or had any desire to splurge.

Two other people sat near Faber and the bespectacled man. One was a younger, black-haired man in fine raiment, includ-

ing a fawnskin vest. He was carrying a new hat and a walking-stick. He would have been decidedly good-looking had it not been for his long, crooked nose.

The fourth member of the party was a strikingly lovely girl who carried herself with a well-bred air. Long lashes shielded her violet eyes, her hair was spun-gold, piled high on her head. She was wearing a wasp-waisted silk dress with a bustle and tight-fitting basque.

She was facing Faber and the man with the goatee, and held a notebook in which she now and then wrote something.

The Rio Kid's heart lifted to her beauty.

"Wish I'd shaved this mornin'!" he thought.

Faber saw him then.

"Why, howdy, Rio Kid!" he greeted. "Thought you boys rode back to Salt Lake City."

"We started, but run into some trouble, Faber," said the Rio Kid.

He could not keep his eyes off the girl.

She met his gaze coolly for a moment, then looked away.

"Yeah?" said Faber. "Well, mebbe I can help yuh out. I'll be through here in a jiffy. . . . Oh, this lady is Miss Ursula Vandort, and this is her father, Perfessor Doctor Vandort. Dorgan, you savvy the Rio Kid and Al Sieber?"

Faber addressed the last to the tall, well-clad man with the long nose, who gave a short nod as he regarded the roughly clad pair. Plainly he felt himself vastly superior to them.

After acknowledging the introductions, Professor Vandort, who had a fine, deep voice and the air of a man of education, went on with what he had been saying to the rancher.

"It's good of you, Mr. Faber, to subscribe, and we appreciate your support. I know it will be most valuable to us."

"Shore, Prof," said Faber, with a breezy wave of his rope-hardened hand. "Put me down for two thousand. I got a daughter and two ruckus-raisin' boys who'll come to school. It's a great thing for Boise, and I'll tell everybody so. Lot of folks been sendin' their young uns all the way to Saint Louis for schoolin'. It'll be a sight handier so close to home, and it'll give the town tone. When yuh aim to open up?"

"We hope to have enough equipment and buildings up in time for the fall term."

"Fine!"

Dorgan said something to the girl in a low voice. She smiled, and wrote again in the notebook. Her white hand was graceful as she busily plied her pencil.

"There are a good many problems," continued the professor. "I think we will be able to procure the large tract of land on the north side of the city—and of course the teaching staff must be provided for. We intend to offer preparatory work as well as college courses, and it's my idea that many of our young folks will be interested in the care and breeding of cattle, in scientific agriculture and other matters vital to the great West. We wish to endow a number of chairs as soon as possible."

"What's he talkin' about?" whispered Sieber, nudging the Rio Kid. "Who wants to undo a chair!"

THE Rio Kid shook his head. The talk was beyond him, though he took it that Professor Vandort was hoping to open some sort of educational institute in Boise.

"I'm glad to have had this opportunity, Mr. Faber," said Vandort, as he shook hands. "I intended to drive out to see you, but when I was told you were in town, I took the liberty of coming to you here."

Faber beamed.

"Any time I can help, Doc."

The professor, his daughter and Dorgan left, and in a moment or so, through an open window, the Rio Kid saw Dorgan handing Miss Vandort into a carriage at the curb. After the professor had seated himself in the vehicle, Dorgan got in, took the reins, and drove off.

Pryor suddenly noticed the dazed look in Lew Mills' eyes as the miner stared after the vanishing carriage. The Rio Kid spoke to him and Mills started.

"She—she's the most beautiful thing in the world!" he mumbled.

Faber grinned.

"Shore she is. Any man'd fall off his hoss for a gal like that. All she has to do is raise them eyes and the boys trip over theirselves subscribin' to the new college."

"Vandort aims to start a school here?" asked the Rio Kid.

"Right. He's been moonin' around for some time, gettin' folks interested. He means to run a bangup academy in Boise.

and it's a great idea. I hate to send my young'uns East to school. Thisaway their ma and me can see 'em now and then. Besides, they can give a hand on the ranch when they're needed. But what's up with you?"

"She ain't married to that tall dude, is she?" asked Mills.

"Oh, no," answered Faber. "Dorgan's been helpin' the prof, that's all. But what's wrong, Rio Kid?"

Pryor quickly told him, of how Sieber had been robbed, how they had followed their one clue to the outlaw stronghold. Faber swore when he heard about his stolen stock, and his broad face grew red.

"So that's it, huh! Some of my friends claimed they've been losin' beefs and mustangs faster'n usual. I've heard tell of that Bannack Jake. He's a bad 'un. Well, we got an organization ourselves—the Redrock Stock Raisers. We can muster enough fighters to smash that rustler bunch. Bet they're drivin' the animals through the passes into Oregon."

"We'll have to move careful," cautioned the Rio Kid. "It's a big, tough gang. Mills believes they're smugglers and likker runners who have been chased down from the Border by the Canadian mounties."

"Well, we'll chase the cusses right back!" declared Faber.

The rancher was in a sweat to start. So was Lew Mills. The miner's mount was at a hitchrack, already saddled, and Faber ordered his own long-legged bay horse saddled up at once.

It was necessary to head for Faber's ranch first. For from there messengers could be sent to other ranchers along Redrock Creek, and to all the neighboring ranches.

CHAPTER IV

Campaign

THAT night the men who had ridden from Boise slept at the Square F, on the stream-bank above high-water mark. The ranchhouse was built of rough-hewn boards and logs from the forests. It was a roomy house over which Faber's wife, Nelly, presided. The Fabers had three children, though, to share it. The oldest was Dan, Junior, who was seventeen, there was another boy of fourteen, and a girl of sixteen.

Faber's rancher friends, with their cowboys, began drifting in early the next day. By suppertime, forty fighters had collected, and after a hot meal prepared by Chinese cooks and supervised by Mrs. Faber, they made ready to ride. At Faber's request, the Rio Kid took command.

The Rio Kid's plan of attack was to get up as close as possible during the darkness, and strike at the first rays of dawn. The ranchers knew the country and, with guides in the lead, the heavily armed posse took the road toward Boise.

It was after midnight when they neared the trail turnoff up the mountainside. Here, the Rio Kid formed two columns, placing Sieber in command of one, and Faber the other. Sieber's column was to work through on the west side of the bandit stronghold, getting into position,

[*Turn page*]

Many Never Suspect Cause of Backaches

This Old Treatment Often Brings Happy Relief

Many sufferers relieve nagging backache quickly, once they discover that the real cause of their trouble may be tired kidneys.

The kidneys are Nature's chief way of taking the excess acids and waste out of the blood. They help most people pass about 3 pints a day.

When disorder of kidney function permits poisonous matter to remain in your blood, it may cause nagging backache, rheumatic pains, leg pains, loss of pep and energy, getting up nights, swelling, puffiness under the eyes, headaches and dizziness. Frequent or scanty passages with smarting and burning sometimes shows there is something wrong with your kidneys or bladder.

Don't wait! Ask your druggist for Doan's Pills, a stimulant diuretic, used successfully by millions for over 50 years. Doan's give happy relief and will help the 15 miles of kidney tubes flush out poisonous waste from your blood. Get Doan's Pills. (Adv.)

and the second column would come up on the east, closing in around the camp.

When they were within a mile of the spot they had to leave their horses. The mounts could not move quietly enough, and the brush would be too thick for them, save on the guarded in-trails.

The Rio Kid moved ahead, to scout the camp. Silent as a stalking panther, he reached the low bluff from which he and Sieber previously had spied on Bannack Jake's crew. The campfires were only ash-heaps now, though faint smoke still was rising against the slanting rock walls. Blanketed figures of sleeping men could be seen, while armed sentinels were on guard.

The longest hour was always the one just before the moment of attack, thought the Rio Kid, as he waited for the dawn. He would give the signal for the rush then—a high-pitched Rebel yell and three shots from his carbine.

After a while, the night sky seemed to be paling in the east, but there must be enough light by which to distinguish friend from foe in the melee. Still, the Rio Kid wanted to strike before the outlaws were fully awake.

Then suddenly on the cool mountain air, a gunshot in the stillness cracked as loud as an exploding cannon. The Rio Kid swore. Had one of Bannack Jake's sentries stumbled on the creeping cowboys? It was too late to wonder what had happened, though, for such men as lurked in the hideout had warning enough. Sentries had leaped up, clutching their weapons. And in the instant of confused awakening, the stirring bandits were swearing vehemently.

"What's up, Dinny?" a harsh voice sang out.

"Don't know, Jake! But we'll find out!"

Men were throwing off their blankets, grabbing shotguns, carbines, and strapping on their pistol belts. It was still too dark for the Rio Kid's liking but now that the element of surprise had been almost destroyed, he knew they must hit at once. He leaped to his feet, uttering the shrill Rebel yell, firing his Spencer three times. But as he had given the signal to charge he had taken aim at dark outlaw figures.

"No use wastin' lead," he muttered.

In the camp, cursing men in flat-topped hats opened a heavy fire into the surrounding brush and woods. Cries and gunshots rose as the attackers drove in.

"The woods are alive with 'em, Bannack!" shrieked a rustler, as he fell back swiftly before the oncoming cowmen.

The Rio Kid hoped to take Bannack Jake, the chief of the gang. He started down around the bluff, sliding on a shale bank. He had an idea of Jake's approximate position. Behind him, he heard Al Sieber urging his men against the stronghold.

Crouched in the rocks, the Rio Kid peered through the dim light, seeking Bannack Jake. Guns were stabbing yellowish flame as they exploded. The din was increasing, and now Faber's column was driving in.

For a moment, the Rio Kid glimpsed the tall, bearded outlaw chief. Bannack Jake was blazing away at the attackers with a Colt. The Rio Kid fired quickly, once, and again.

"I hit him, I believe!" he thought.

Bannack's pistol had stopped blaring, but a knot of outlaws had turned to deal with the Rio Kid. He squatted behind boulders as lead rattled all around him, spraying him with shale and metal fragments.

Then Sieber and his men burst into the clearing, pouring in a steady fire. Faber was whooping it up on the opposite side.

THE bandits, aware that they were surrounded, broke and ran. Some took lead, and fell in their tracks. Guns roared, echoing heavily in the wilderness, and cursing opponents locked horns in swift battle.

"Some of 'em'll escape!" thought the Rio Kid, as he jumped up and charged through the clearing.

It was still too dark for long range shooting, and there were not enough in Faber's party to close the gaps. There was room for desperate men to slip by. But prisoners were being taken.

The Rio Kid hastily worked toward the spot where he had last spied Bannack Jake. However, the big rustler chief was gone.

When light finally bathed the world in gray beauty, and all firing had stopped, the Rio Kid took stock. They had taken a number of prisoners, others of the outlaws had been killed, but still others had suc-

ceeded in their rush for freedom. They had horses in the dense woods, and knew every inch of the territory.

Cowboys who had been chasing outlaws through the brush, began coming back to camp. The Rio Kid found that they had lost one man, and that several were wounded, but they had broken up the gang and taken twenty prisoners who were tied up and under guard—sullen-eyed, bearded men who wore rough clothing and flat-crowned hats, with black buzzard feathers stuck in the bands.

Dan Faber rushed up, to slap the Rio Kid heartily on the back.

"We shore smashed the cusses, Rio Kid!" he cried exultantly.

"Who fired that first shot?" demanded Pryor. "It wrecked the surprise."

"Aw, one of the boys stumbled on a root and his finger closed on his rifle trigger," said Faber. "Couldn't be helped."

There was always someone in such a large force to make a mistake and give away the game, thought the Rio Kid. But there was no use in blaming anybody now.

In the big robbers' roost they found goods, food, liquor, and other stores, with an arsenal of weapons and ammunition. In hidden corrals they discovered Square F and other branded cattle and mustangs, which were recovered by the rightful owners.

The sun was up, and the wounded had been taken care of when they cooked breakfast, comparing experiences. All the men applauded the Rio Kid's leadership, his acumen and fighting ability.

On one dead bandit they found Sieber's money. On some of the prisoners they located Lew Mills' gold, and returned it to the miner.

After breakfast, when everything of value had been removed, they set fire to the shacks, and destroyed the hideout. Then Dan Faber, the Rio Kid, Sieber and Mireles, Lew Mills and several cowmen started for Boise. . . .

That evening they were celebrating their victory at the hotel, seated at a large round table, when a tall man in a dusty black suit hurried up to Faber. He towered over them all, for he was six-foot-four, and broad of shoulder as well. He wore no hat on his long head, with its thick, sandy hair, and his blue eyes glowed. The Rio Kid silently commented that the man's hands and feet were the most enormous he had ever seen.

"Now look here, Faber," the fellow said in a husky voice, "I want the story. The *Statesman* comes out tomorrow, but I'll work all night to set her up. I hear you boys smashed an army of outlaws."

"That's right, Reynolds," said Faber expansively. "Go ahead and write it up. Pull up a chair first, and wet yore whistle. 'Twas Bannack Jake's gang."

"Bannack Jake!" cried Reynolds. "Why, I know the scoundrel." He sat down and took paper and pencil from his pocket. "I saw him last year when I made a trip to Idaho City. Tell me all about it."

"Well, we heard about his bunch," explained Faber, "and the Rio Kid here led us to their hideout. That's it in a nutshell."

"My readers don't want nutshells," Reynolds said disgustedly. "They want the meat. Start at the beginning and don't skip any details."

Bit by bit, he drew out the story. He was much interested in the Rio Kid, as Faber described how he had led the fight.

"What's your full name, suh, and where do you hail from?" demanded Reynolds.

When Reynolds had turned to speak with Al Sieber, the Rio Kid nudged Faber.

"Who's this hombre, anyways?" he asked in a low voice.

"Oh—he's Jim Reynolds, editor and publisher of the Idaho *Statesman*. Fine feller—mighty important in these parts. What he says goes in the Territory. I thought everybody savvied him."

"It was all the Rio Kid, mister," Al Sieber was saying protestingly. "I just went along for the ride."

WHEN James Reynolds had pumped everybody dry, he gulped down the remainder of his drink and jumped up.

"Thanks, gents," he said crisply. "Don't miss tomorrow's edition."

The Rio Kid thought no more of it until the next day. He and Mireles, as well as Sieber and Lew Mills, who had slept in a carriage shed behind the Capital Hotel, had breakfasted at the Idaho Lunch & Diner. Sieber had left them to hunt for some of his favorite tobacco and the Rio Kid went to the livery stable to curry

Saber. When Sieber found him there, a little later, he grinned and sang out:

"Howdy, Hour Man!"

"Huh? What's the joke?"

Sieber held out the newspaper he had bought—the *Tri-weekly Idaho Statesman,* with Reynolds' name on the masthead. Though crudely printed on a hand press, it was a real power in the Territory, and now, in the largest type the paper possessed, the fight against the outlaws was told in florid Frontier style. Beside it another headlined story was about Bob Pryor, the Rio Kid, and titled:

MAN OF THE HOUR

The Rio Kid's face began to burn as he read the extravagant praises heaped upon his head, though he grinned at the editor's fancy embellishments.

"Captain Robert Pryor, war hero, known on the Frontier as the Rio Kid. . . . cool, intrepid, daring, a leader of brave men . . . planned the attack and led the posse against the outlaw stronghold, swarming with fierce killers who planned to despoil our citizens and fair valley . . . smashed them with his flaming guns . . . Seriously wounded the bandit chief, Bannack Jake . . .

"Shucks, it wasn't that good," he growled.

Sieber was amused.

"Yuh're a hero in Boise now," he declared. "Yuh better live up to it. They say a gang of gals dressed in pink are goin' to run ahead of yuh and toss flowers in yore path."

"No!"

The Rio Kid was almost taken in, but caught the sly gleam in his friend's eyes, and laughed with Sieber.

CHAPTER V

Threats

CELESTINO MIRELES and Lew Mills, who had hit it off well together, were working on their horses, removing burs and other stickers from mane and tail and coat, a dangerous pastime with the half-wild mustangs. Hoofs and clicking teeth missed only by inches as the animals resented being so handled.

The Rio Kid took a seat on a carriage step nearby and read the *Statesman* through.

"Here's a piece about Perfessor Vandort and his college, Al," he called. "Says folks are all for it and money's pourin' in. Interestin', ain't it?"

Sieber squatted down, facing him.

"Yeah, she is," he said. "I never see a purtier one." Then he added, "Yuh don't seem in any hurry to pull out of Boise."

"To tell the truth, I ain't," the Rio Kid admitted. "I was thinkin' we might hang around a few days. You agreeable?"

Sieber shrugged.

"I aim to run back to Arizona before long, Rio Kid," he said. "Things are hummin' there. General Crook's goin' down and I may scout for him. But I can spare a day or two."

"Bueno."

In the afternoon, when the four rode slowly through the center of the bustling city, it proved to be bad enough for the Rio Kid, though not so embarrassing as Sieber had feigned. Boys, recognizing Pryor, ran shouting after him.

"There's the Rio Kid!"

"Hey, Rio Kid! Bang! Bang!"

Pretending to be running a gunfight, they made loud, cracking noises, aiming sticks and fingers. The horses snorted and pranced in protest.

Older people were more restrained, they pointed or nodded at the riders. Everybody seemed to recognize the Rio Kid and his friends.

"There's that lady we met," said Sieber suddenly.

A covered carriage rolled from a side street in front of them. Dorgan was driving, and the professor and his pretty daughter were on the wide seat beside him.

The Rio Kid saluted, touching the brim of his Army Stetson, and Ursula smiled and nodded.

"Did yuh see that, Al! She recognized me!"

Sieber smiled.

"Who don't? Yuh're good for free drinks for a month here."

The Vandort carriage drew up across from the City Hall in front of the two-story frame building which housed the

JAMES S. REYNOLDS

BORN in New York State in 1829, James Reynolds grew up to become a printer, attorney and schoolteacher. He reached Idaho Territory shortly after Boise was made the capital, and set up a newspaper the Idaho Statesman. Probably he wielded more power than any other man in the Territory while he remained in Idaho.

He was the terror of evildoers, with his tri-weekly paper in which he fought for the good of the citizens. He published his paper in a two-story frame building at Seventh and Idaho Streets, across from the City Hall.

He was a big man, standing six-feet-four, had enormous hands and feet, a long head with sandy hair, and kind blue eyes. His voice was husky. He was soft-hearted with decent people and friends but he gave his foes no quarter, and had no fear of them. He did not carry a gun, but in his office he had a large collection of iron bars, wagon spokes, ax handles, and a couple of antiquated horse pistols, ostensibly for self-defense against outraged rascals whom he criticized in his newspaper.

Later, because of domestic troubles, Reynolds left Idaho for California.

Idaho *Statesman*. Yates Dorgan handed down Miss Vandort and her father, and the three entered the newspaper office.

"I'm goin' in," said the Rio Kid. "I want a word with Reynolds, Al."

"I can imagine." Sieber sniffed. "I'll wait here."

"Can I come along, Rio Kid?" Lew Mills asked.

"Shore."

As the Rio Kid entered the building he could smell printer's ink, paper, and grease and oil that were used on the presses. In Reynolds' private office, the big editor stood behind his paper-littered desk. Ursula Vandort and her father were just seating themselves, and Dorgan stood at the girl's side, but turned as though to block the Rio Kid and Mills at the doorway.

"Wait outside, boys," he said loftily. "We'll not be long."

"Why, it's the Rio Kid!" Reynolds boomed. "Come in, suh, come in."

The Rio Kid shouldered past Dorgan.

"Good mornin' Perfessor—and Miss Vandort. I wanted to tell yuh I'd like to give yuh a hand if possible. Faber told me all about you and yore college, and it's a plumb fine idea."

"That's nice of you," murmured Ursula. "We've been reading about you, Rio Kid. It's very exciting."

"Yes, indeed, we're glad to see you, sir," Vandort said quickly. "We're here to thank Mr. Reynolds for all the publicity he's given our proposed college, and to tell him that we now have the land for it. We have purchased the entire tract from Mr. Duke Anson for seventy-five thousand dollars."

"You don't say!" Reynolds was much interested. "So Anson did own that land! I didn't believe him when he claimed he had won the tract from Hale, who was a friend of mine, in a dice game. That was soon after Hale was found dead one morning, down by the river."

"Hale was known to gamble heavily at times," said Dorgan. "The title was properly registered and transferred to Duke Anson. It can have no bearing on the killing of Hale, if he was killed, Mr. Reynolds."

"Of course not," Reynolds agreed.

THE Rio Kid looked about the editor's office. He knew that Frontier journalism was a virile, often a dangerous vocation. A man like Reynolds spared no invective in describing his own enemies or those he believed to be enemies of the community. Many a luckless editor had lost his life or been forced to flee after exposing thieving but powerful opponents.

In a rack close to Reynolds' desk stood a collection of iron bars, ax handles, and wagon spokes as well as a brace of huge, antiquated horse pistols. It was well known that Reynelds seldom went armed and that he was utterly fearless. The Rio Kid wondered if the ferocious array of clubs and guns were not a slyly humorous gesture.

"The people seem most receptive to the idea of a good school here," remarked Vandort, whose enterprise filled his mind to the exclusion of all else. "We wish to set up a comfortable endowment fund, and chairs for many important subjects. Contributions are coming in well, but of course we need more."

The Rio Kid had the profits from the horse deal in his pocket. He drew out his roll and peeled off three hundred dollars.

"I'd like to throw it in the kitty, Perfessor," he said.

Vandort beamed.

"Very good of you, sir."

And Ursula's smile was worth it, thought Bob Pryor.

Dorgan spoke up then. "You may say, Reynolds, that I'm contributing two thousand dollars to the endowment fund, as Doctor Vandort's aide."

"That's wonderful, Yates!" cried Ursula, and the professor was delighted.

"I knew my confidence in you was not misplaced, my boy," he said.

The Rio Kid felt like a piker but he could not match Dorgan's affluence. Suddenly Lew Mills threw down a leather sack filled with gold dust.

"There's twenty-five hundred in this," he said. "It's for the school."

The Rio Kid was surprised, but gleeful because Mills had topped Dorgan.

The young fellow's face was red, as all eyes were turned on him. The beautiful Ursula observed him gravely.

"Thank you, sir," said her father. "Have we had the pleasure of meeting you before?"

"No, suh."

"This is Lew Mills, a pard of mine," said the Rio Kid.

As Miss Vandort and the professor made the acquaintance of the miner, Reynolds was making notes. A list of contributors to the university was published in each issue of the *Statesman,* the highest sums being printed at the top, egging rivals to outdo one another.

"I have an item for you, Reynolds," said Dorgan. "I have decided to settle in Boise, and have bought the El Dorado on State Street. I mean to run it as a high-class place."

"Fine!" cried Reynolds.

The Rio Kid was not too fond of Yates Dorgan and his superior manner, but he seemed to have the inside track with Vandort and his daughter. But the fact that Dorgan was opening a saloon and gambling palace could not be held against him, for owners of such places often served in public positions and were con-

sidered good citizens.

He turned to speak to Ursula, but she and Lew Mills were talking in low voices.

"You say your home is in Pennsylvania?" the Rio Kid heard Ursula ask.

"Yes'm, near Lancaster, on the pike," said Lew.

"I know the country well," she murmured. "It's beautiful."

"Didn't take him long to forget Alzina," mused the Rio Kid.

He and Mills saw the professor and Ursula to their carriage.

"Come see us, won't you?" said the girl. "We have a house at Twenty-five Main Street."

When they had driven off, the Rio Kid swung on Mills.

"Yuh shore handed over yore roll, Lew, on the spur of the moment!"

Mills looked flustered.

"I—well, it's a good cause," he said. "I got five hundred left and I'll get into a game tonight and either be broke or on top of the world. Rio Kid, that young lady has got me, just lookin' at her. I'm telling you, so it's all fair and square."

Pryor held out his hand. "May the best man win, Lew. Let's have a drink."

That night, Sieber, Pryor and Mills visited one of the big gambling places on State Street. Sieber and the Rio Kid had lost steadily, and soon pulled out, but Mills was winning, so they left the young miner at the tables.

"Let's take a stroll and get some fresh air in our lungs," suggested Sieber. "That place was so full of smoke I couldn't breathe."

LIGHTS blazed in the city. Men and women were in the streets, and music came from places of entertainment. The two friends walked along the board way, under wooden awnings, taking in the busy, lively town of Boise.

They paused under an oil street lamp near an iron watering trough at the edge of the park while the Rio Kid rolled a cigarette. He had just struck a match to light it when a bullet cut a chunk of felt from his hat and shrieked on through the air.

As Sieber and the Rio Kid jumped, another slug tore between them.

"Move!" yelled Sieber, and they ran for the shadows.

From the shelter of a big tree they stared at the buildings across the way, sure the drygulcher was hidden in one.

"Now what was that all about?" wondered Sieber. "Yuh reckon it was a mistake, them shootin' at us?"

"I doubt it," growled the Rio Kid. "Bannack Jake got away and so'd a bunch of his boys. They may have pards in town. And come to think of it, that newspaper yarn could work two ways. It told the outlaws who to thank for the attack!"

They had almost forgotten the incident the next night, however, when they decided to pay a visit to the Eldorado, the saloon and gambling house which Yates Dorgan had purchased. Both were rather curious to see Dorgan in his new role of host.

"This is shore a swell joint he's opened," Al Sieber remarked, when they had entered the place, lined up at the bar, and been served. "Likker ain't bad, either."

"There's Duke Anson playin' poker," the Rio Kid observed. "He's the hombre the university bought that big tract of land from—remember? Reckon Anson'll lose it all. He gambles right high, I've heard, and most every night."

Duke Anson was a man of about thirty. His complexion was florid, made more so, perhaps, by the large amount of whisky he consumed when he played cards. He was clad in a checked suit and a fawnskin vest. His flaxen hair was plastered to his round head with pomade, and he was frowning.

The El Dorado was a large two-story building, looming over its neighbors on State Street. The main bar occupied most of the front section. Clean, damp sawdust covered the floor, and the bar had been carted in by mule teams, for no railroad as yet had reached Boise. It was imitation mahogany, freshy varnished, with mirrors behind it, and shelves holding glasses and bottles. White-aproned barkeepers served the customers. There were tables, benches and chairs for those who did not wish to put a foot on the brass rail. On the far side was a place for dancers, and a piano and violin were played by "professors." In the rear were gaming rooms, some private.

The two men glanced down the bar at Yates Dorgan, who was having a drink with a wealthy stockman.

"What yuh make of Dorgan, Al?" asked the Rio Kid.

"Don't know," replied Sieber. "But anybody with fingers as long and limber as his must be good at cards. I'm surprised how interested he is in helpin' Vandort, to tell the truth."

"Me, too. He don't look like the kind who'd hand over his money to a cause."

"Who does? You done it, and so'd Mills. Mebbe Dorgan likes that gal, too. Sometimes I feel like flingin' my own hat in the ring."

The Rio Kid shook his head.

"Dorgan's got a soul like a fish," he said thoughtfully. "He's cold and calculatin'. The perfessor sets a lot of store by him, though."

CHAPTER VI

Brawl

IT HAD been a week now since the Rio Kid and his companions had arrived in Boise. In that time they had grown to know the Vandorts, had visited several times at the large square frame building on Main Street where Ursula had set up a home for her father. She was a scholar, but she also was a good housekeeper and a fine cook.

There were three other teachers staying with the Vandorts. Two had brought their families to Idaho, and were assisting in setting up the new school. They were educated men, immersed in their jobs, kindly folks with the best of intentions, the sort to settle a wild community. More educators were on the way to Boise.

The land had been purchased and several temporary buildings were being set up—large tents, and shacks in which the first classes might be held. Plans had been drawn for permanent structures of brick and wood, and wells were being dug. All of this required money.

While the Rio Kid and Sieber were talking about it, a big man in a frock coat and silk hat came into the saloon, a man who looked important.

He banged on the bar.

"Is there a son-of-a-gun here who'll drink with the Governor of Idaho?" he sang out.

Dorgan hurried forward to shake hands and slap the Territorial governor on the back. They drank and the crowd grew noisier. The Rio Kid nudged Sieber.

"Let's go over to the Drovers' Bar, Al. Ain't so busy there."

They rode to a smaller, less pretentious place, where men were at the bar and tables, and smoke curled around two big hanging oil lamps.

Celestino liked to turn in early, and had gone off to sleep. Lew Mills was gambling, trying to win money for the university fund. So Sieber and the Rio Kid were forced to seek entertainment alone. They were not too successful, but it was midnight when the Rio Kid yawned, saying:

"Let's turn in, Al."

"Suits me, because—"

At the way Sieber broke off the Rio Kid grew suddenly alert. A well-bodied man in leather clothes and a dark Stetson, staggered toward them, and a thin-faced fellow who had been silently drinking at Sieber's elbow, slid along the bar. The big one bumped heavily into the Rio Kid.

"Cuss yuh, watch what yuh're doin'!" he snarled, snatching at the Rio Kid's gun hand.

"Over the bar, pronto!" shouted Sieber, lashing out with his Colt at the thin-faced attacker, who had missed his lunge at Al.

Five toughs who were seated at a round table jumped up and whipped out guns.

The Rio Kid could shoot with either hand. He pulled his Colt with his left hand and rammed the muzzle into his assailant's middle, then twisted off lithely as the big fellow, gasping, doubled up by the pain, loosened his grip.

Sieber vaulted the bar, the Rio Kid after him. The men at the table blasted away as the two dropped behind the solid wooden barrier. Bullets shrieked over them as patrons were hastily ducking.

Pistol drawn, the Rio Kid scurried along the floor for the back of the place, Sieber at his boot heels. A bartender, scrunched up under the shelf, swore at them in fright but did not try to stop them.

Over his shoulder, the Rio Kid saw one of his enemies pop up at the bar. A quick

GENERAL JOHN McALLISTER SCHOFIELD

BORN in New York State, John Schofield graduated from West Point in 1853, then served two years in the artillery. He taught at West Point and at Washington U., St. Louis, from which latter post he became a major of volunteers at the outbreak of the Civil War.

He performed various military duties in Missouri, and in 1863 took command of the Army of the Cumberland. Years later, in 1892, Gen. Schofield received the Congressional Medal of Honor for "conspicuous gallantry at the battle of Wilson's Creek."

In '64, as commander of a division in the Army of the Ohio, he took part in the Atlanta campaign under General Sherman. For his services later in Tennessee he was awarded the rank of Brigadier, and in March, 1865, was breveted Major-General in the regular Army. After the war, he was sent on a diplomatic mission to France, on account of the presence of French troops in Mexico.

He served as Secretary of War under Andrew Johnson. From 1876 to 1881 he was superintendent of the West Point Military Academy. In 1895 he was made Lieutenant-General. He is author of "Forty-six Years in the Army."

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shot sent him screeching back. The small room reverberated with explosions, excited cries.

"They're going out the back, boys!" roared someone. "Stop 'em!"

There was an open door to the rear, only a few steps from the end of the bar. The stamp of heavy boots shook the two oil lamps hanging from the rafters. The Rio Kid hastily fired at one, then the other. As they went out, he rushed for the exit, followed by Sieber.

Through a short hall, then into a wider room where surprised gamblers looked up from their game, the pair dashed. They were out of sight of the men who had tried to kill them.

Tearing out into the street, they rushed on. But the Rio Kid paused at the corner of a brick building. From that vantage point, as men burst from the back door of the saloon, the Rio Kid stung them with

shots. Lead whistled near in reply.

"Let's make the hosses!" said Sieber.

Their mounts were standing where they had left them. A man with a city marshal's badge pinned to his vest was hurrying toward the saloon, alarmed by the gunfire. Deputies were running along the street.

THE men who had tried for the Rio Kid and Sieber must have realized there was no time for them to follow their prey. They split up, quickly disappearing as the Rio Kid and Sieber yelled to the lawman and began a hunt for their assailants.

"Yuh recognize any of the skunks?" asked the marshal, when they paused for breath after a fruitless search.

"Not me," replied the Rio Kid. "Did you, Al?"

"Nope. Could have been some of Bannack Jake's gang. Yuh'd have to savvy a man mighty well to recognize him with his beard shaved off and different clothes on."

It had been a studied attempt on their lives. The men who had attacked them had all entered the saloon after they had, undoubtedly trailing them from the street.

"Cowardly Attack on Heroes!" Reynolds headlined it in his next issue. In his story he excoriated the gunmen as follows:

Boise must be cleansed of such vile elements! There must be safety for our women and children, for decent people who wish to live in peace! We demand action!

The following afternoon, the Rio Kid called at the Vandort home.

"Father's expecting Mr. Tenny, a contractor," Ursula informed him. "I may have to take notes, but I hope you'll wait and have tea later. I've just been reading about the narrow escape you and Mr. Sieber had last night." She was horrified at the brazen attempt on their lives.

"Oh, we managed to shoot our way out, ma'am," he assured her. "Prob'ly some of Bannack Jake's old bunch."

"It's awful, that they'd dare attack you. I know the Frontier's rough, but the city must be made safe. Lew wasn't with you, was he?"

"No. He's all right."

He thought there was relief in her eyes. She was interested in Lew Mills—no doubt about it.

Ursula was well-educated, cultured, yet she was not the sort to set herself above others. She had real kindness in her heart, a quality which attracted others as well as the Rio Kid. Until her father had brought her to Idaho, she had lived a sheltered life, chiefly interested in study. But the raw Frontier, with its dangers, fascinated while it awed her, as it had many other women of her kind.

Dr. Vandort came into the room. He had an absent-minded, though kindly, air. Ursula straightened his tie and brushed dust from his coat. But in spite of all her care, the professor managed to look untidy.

"How do you do, sir!" he exclaimed as he recognized the Rio Kid.

There was a knock at the front door, and Ursula went to answer it. She returned with Yates Dorgan and a tall, shambling man in a black suit and white shirt. His face was smooth-shaven, his hair neatly trimmed and brushed back, held in place by pomade. He gripped a black hat in a large red hand.

"This is Mr. Frederick Tenny, the contractor I told you about," Dorgan told Vandort. "I've talked with him, and I'm sure he'll give us the best price on the buildings."

"I shore will, Perfessor," declared Tenny, as he shook hands with Vandort. "Yuh can count on me."

Ursula went to call Vandort's teacher associates, and they entered the room—Mr. Cass, a slim quiet young man who taught mathematics, Professor Hobson, bespectacled, stout and affable, a scientist of distinction, and Professor Adolf Rohr, a language teacher, educators who were devoting their lives to inspiring young men and women to better things.

They had left the security of Eastern jobs for the Frontier for that purpose, had brought their families with them. Others would be coming as the endowment funds swelled, and Vandort was enabled to make financial arrangements for distinguished scholars to teach at the university.

FASCINATED, the Rio Kid watched Ursula chiefly, as he sat waiting, while a discussion of building plans went on. Dorgan seemed to have full confidence in the contractor, who was all smiles.

"You won't find a better man, gentlemen," declared Dorgan. "Tenny built for us, back in Kansas, and did a great job of it. He's recently come to Idaho, and I sent for him, because he'll build just as you want, at the lowest prices."

The Rio Kid was rather bored. This was not his line. So the talk went in one ear and out the other.

When Vandort and his teachers had talked with Tenny for about an hour, they held a consultation.

"It sounds favorable, Mr. Tenny," Vandort said then. "Of course, we'll have to check your figures, and get a formal acceptance from the full committee. We'll let you know. It won't be long, for we're eager to get the permanent buildings started."

"Fine, fine, Perfessor!" Tenny beamed.

The Rio Kid stayed for tea, which Ursula served. Tenny and Dorgan chatted with Vandort and his aides, but the Rio Kid realized that the girl was anxious about something.

"Lew usually drops in around this time," she finally said, and the Rio Kid knew the reason for her restlessness then.

She was interested in Lew Mills, all right.

CHAPTER VII

Anson Spills the Beans

MILLS laid down his five cards — three queens and a pair of treys. A full house.

"That beats your heart flush, Anson," he said.

Three cowboys who had been tagging along in the poker session, which had lasted for twelve hours, all through the afternoon and well into the evening, stared respectfully at the huge stack of chips in front of Mills. It was a miracle to them how the money had flowed to the miner the way a magnet draws steel. He had lost pots, but had come back to win greater ones.

Duke Anson's face, always red, was suffused with blood now, giving him a beetlike color. Ashes and whisky stained his checked suit and fancy vest, and his flaxen hair was tousled. He had drunk throughout the game, and eaten little. Mills, too, was tired, but he had the staying power of youth, and besides, after a few sips, he had let his glass stand untouched.

They were in a private gaming room at the rear of the El Dorado where tobacco smoke hung thickly. It was nearly two in the morning and the cowboys were sleepy.

"We got to be goin', gents," one of them who rode for Dan Faber at the Square F declared. "We can just make it in time for breakfast. So long. You shore had luck, Mills."

"Next time it'll be different," Mills said, smiling.

Anson had paid off from a roll which had been large at the start of the game, but had shrunk to almost nothing. Mills, with several thousand dollars in his pockets, felt like Croesus.

Duke Anson slumped in his chair, staring at the wall.

"Broke!" he moaned.

Mills called a waiter.

"Let's have some ham and eggs and coffee," he ordered. "That suit you, Anson?"

"Make mine straight whisky," mouthed Anson.

Mills felt sorry for the man. He was taking his losing hard.

The waiter brought a fresh bottle of liquor, and glasses. Anson poured a long one and downed it, then a second, his hand shaking. By the time Mills was eating, and drinking hot coffee, Anson was intoxicated. His tongue loosened, as Mills sympathized with him.

"It ain't right!" Anson mourned. "Me, broke! I got ten dolluhs left. Huh! And if you only savvied! Me, I put it over, shore I did. The whole deal."

Mills listened indulgently to his babbling. He knew that drunken men were often taken with a loquacious spell like this.

"Tough luck, Anson," he repeated.

"Luck?" Anson blurted. "Why, I had it in my hands, that fortune! Cashed the check at the bank, see, had it right in my hands!" He held up his trembling fingers, went cross-eyed as he watched them wiggle. "Cheated, that's what!" he growled.

"The game was fair and square," objected Mills, a little indignantly.

"You—fair and square, shore. But the boss—why, he only give me three thousan'! All gone now, all gone. He took the hog's share. Wish I had Bannack Jake's nerve. I bet he gets his split off them buildin' contracts." Tears were flowing down Anson's ruby cheeks, and he sniffled like a hurt child.

"Bannack Jake? You savvy him? Where's he come in?" Mills was suddenly interested in the drunken babblings.

"Yeah, yeah. Him and the boss—like this." Anson tried to cross his fingers but failed miserably, succeeding only with his eyes. He had another drink.

"Where's Bannack Jake now?" Mills asked sharply.

Anson chortled slyly. "Contractor! Imagine! That gunslinger makin' fools out of them perfessors and their college!"

Lew Mills felt a cold hand touch his heart. He sensed he was getting close to some terrible secret that touched Ursula and the kindly folks who were her friends. Anson had some connection with it all. So had Bannack Jake. He recalled then that a contractor was to be interviewed about the buildings, or perhaps had been, already.

He went over to Anson and took him by the arm.

"Here," he said. "We're pards, Anson. I'll lend you some money. You need it after being cheated by your boss. Who is the skunk?"

Anson passed a trembling hand across his burning, bloodshot eyes. For an instant, a touch of fear sobered him, and he stared at Mills. But the effort was too much, and his head sank on his chest. After a few twitchings he began to snore heavily.

Mills tried to shake him awake.

"Anson, wake up. Who's yore boss? Where's Bannack Jake?"

He broke off, aware that men were in the hall just outside the door which the waiter had left ajar.

YATES DORGAN and a big man with fresh-shaven face and pomaded black hair came into the room.

For a moment, Mills considered confiding in Dorgan. The saloon owner was a trusted associate of Vandort. But the presence of the stranger deterred him.

"What's this, Mills?" demanded Dorgan, scowling at the slumped Anson.

"We had a long game, Dorgan," Mills said, "and he passed out."

"Dorgan's nose twitched and he exchanged a quick glance with his tall companion.

"Anson's a fool when he's drunk," he said shortly. "What's he been sayin'?"

"Nothin' much. Just babblin'."

Mills was eager to get out into the clear night air, so he could think. But Dorgan blocked the doorway, and there was a beady glow in the stranger's eyes.

Mills was a brave man, but he felt a chill down his spine, and his stomach fluttered. His gun was in a back pocket, and it would take a fatal moment to draw it. He could hardly believe the change he saw in Dorgan. He had considered him a dude, perhaps a rival for Ursula, but not coldly dangerous, as he appeared now.

Mills kept his nerve. He yawned, and said easily:

"I'm worn out. Reckon I'll turn in."

"Wait!" It was a command, the way Dorgan said it.

"What's wrong?" inquired Mills innocently.

Dorgan's dark eyes drilled him, seeking to fathom his thoughts. Dorgan was not sure of his suspicion, and did not want to do anything to injure his standing.

"Why take a chance?" drawled the stranger softly.

"Mills! Lew Mills!"

Relief flooded Mills' heart.

"In here, Rio Kid!" he sang out instantly. "Room fourteen!"

The Rio Kid, followed by Al Sieber, came quickly to the doorway.

"So there yuh are! Heard yuh'd been in a game here all day. Got worried when it got so late." The Rio Kid nodded to Dorgan and the tall man. "Evenin', Dorgan. Evenin', Tenny."

Mills wasted no time getting out of the room. With the Rio Kid and Sieber, he went to the bar.

"Let's get outside, boys," Mills urged, glancing back over his shoulder.

Dorgan and Tenny had followed them and were standing at the back of the bar. Employees of Dorgan's, armed bouncers and strongarm men were around. Lew Mills made a bee-line for the door.

"What's wrong?" asked the Rio Kid, trying to keep pace with Mills, who prac-

AL SIEBER

ALBERT SIEBER was born in Baden, Germany Feb. 29, 1844. He was brought to America as a boy, living in Pennsylvania and then Minnesota. At an early age he enlisted as a sharpshooter in the Union Army and fought at Gettysburg, where he was wounded. He was in active service till the end of the Civil War.

After the war he did some scouting in the Southwest, and tried his luck as a miner out West.

In '71 Sieber was in Arizona as a scout under Gen. Stoneman. He became head of a band of friendly Apache scouts. The Indians' name for him was "Iron Man." Tireless as well as fearless, he became known as the greatest scout in the Southwest, for he was a keen observer. The Apaches believed he bore a charmed life. He was hit twenty-eight times by bullets and arrows and always kept going. He himself killed fifty men in personal combat during the wars.

Fair and square, red and white men alike revered Al Sieber, and to the Army he was invaluable. He scouted for Generals Crook, Miles, Grierson and Wilcox, and helped fight Geronimo and other Indian chiefs.

Retired from service because of wounds, Sieber was working near Roosevelt, Arizona, one day in 1907, bossing a gang of Apaches who were building a road. When a huge boulder toppled, Sieber saw it moving and tried to save his men, sacrificing his own life to do so.

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tically ran up the sidewalk. "Did yuh win?"

"Plenty. I can buy a bed, let alone a chair, for one of them professors. But that's not all. Wait'll we're back to the shack."

When they had decided to stay in Boise for a while, the four had rented an empty shack, where they slept, and stowed their gear. They lit a candle. Mireles was sleeping, but woke when his companions began talking. Mills was highly excited over what he had managed to learn from Duke Anson.

"Huh!" grunted Sieber, scratching his sandy head when Mills had finished. "I

don't savvy. Bannack Jake's a contractor?"

"That's what Anson claimed—that Jake would cheat the professors. Who's that big man you called Tenny?"

"Oh, that's Fred Tenny, a contractor Dorgan wants to have the buildin' job," replied the Rio Kid. "What you've told us, Lew, sounds mighty fishy. Looks like Anson, actin' for his boss—whoever he is—got the seventy-five thousand that was paid for the land. There's plenty of chances to steal and graft on the buildin', at that, if a man was a-mind to."

The Rio Kid was grave, realizing that Mills had come upon an ugly situation. Of course, the university had possession of the land, had clear title to it. How Duke Anson had obtained it was another matter.

"This is a dangerous game, boys," said the Rio Kid. "We'll have to tread mighty careful-like. If Bannack Jake's in Boise, he's hidin'."

"Or disguised," said Sieber.

"That's possible." Pryor nodded. "After all, none of us had much of a look at him, with him lurkin' behind them whiskers."

"That editor hombre, Reynolds, claims he knows Bannack Jake," reminded Sieber.

"I was thinkin' of Reynolds." The Rio Kid frowned as he turned it all over in his mind. "Duke Anson's soft. He's got no nerve, even when sober. S'pose we pick him up and make him tell us what's goin' on? It's the quickest, easiest way, as I see it."

"That's the stuff," agreed Sieber. "When'll we start?"

"What's the matter with right now?" asked the Rio Kid.

A FEW minutes later, the four—Mireles rose and buckled on his guns to join them—hurried back to the El Dorado.

Late as it was, the music was going full blast, and dancers were hopping about. Games of chance went on, while serious drinkers lined the bars or slouched over tables. The El Dorado was a gold mine. Dorgan would make money hand over fist.

The Rio Kid looked through the open front doorway, but did not see Dorgan, Tenny or Duke Anson. Then he tried the back, but the lighted private room where Mills had last seen Anson was unoccupied.

"Let's go into the barroom—but watch yore backs," cautioned the Rio Kid.

At the bar, he asked a bartender whether Anson was about.

"I ain't seen him," the man said, with a shrug. "He must've gone home."

"He lives at the Capital Hotel, he told me," said Mills.

As they turned to leave, Yates Dorgan strolled through the back hall and came up to the bar. Tenny was not with him. He saw the quartet, and nodded.

"Hello, boys," he said easily. "Thought you'd turned in." He had regained his superior manner and did not seem flustered. "Have a round on the house. Set 'em up, George."

"We felt restless," drawled the Rio Kid. "Mills won a big roll tonight, Dorgan."

"That so? Glad to hear it."

Dorgan was not interested.

As soon as they had finished the drink, the four left the El Dorado, mounted, and rode toward the Capital. There they left their horses with dropped reins, and went into the lighted lobby. A night clerk was behind the desk.

"Duke Anson come in?" asked the Rio Kid.

"Haven't seen him all day," replied the clerk. "He might have slid by, though—come in another door."

Anson's room was on the ground floor and to the rear. The dark kitchens were next it. The door was bolted from inside, and there was no answer to their knock.

"He's gone to bed," said the clerk, who had worriedly trailed them along the corridor.

"His light's still on," growled the Rio Kid.

They banged again.

"Hush!" the clerk wailed. "Yuh'll wake everybody up!"

"All right. Come on, boys."

The Rio Kid led the way out a side door, and around to the rear, along a gravel path to Anson's window, which stood half open. Curtains partially hid the interior, as the Rio Kid stuck his leg over the sill and climbed in. On the blood-stained counterpane over the bed lay the body of Duke Anson, his throat slit from ear to ear.

With a muttered curse, the Rio Kid glided to the bedside.

The little oil lamp, with its glass chimney decorated by a gay etching of a dancing girl, had been turned down. On the table beside the bed lay a sheet of paper, with a sentence written on it, and a sharp knife, its handle initialed "D.A.," was in Anson's dead hand. The untidy scrawl read:

Goodby Crool World. I had enuff.

Brown mud, and bits of gravel were fresh on the green straw mat. They had been left by Sieber and Mills who had come in after him, fouling up the trail.

"Is he dead?" asked Mills.

"As a doornail," snapped the Rio Kid. "Let's be careful. We don't want to cover up any sign."

Sieber was examining the note. "Yuh don't believe Anson done it hisself, after losin' his roll?" he asked.

Bob Pryor shrugged.

"It's too neat a job for a man to do on hisself, Al—let's get out of here."

CHAPTER VIII

Suspicion

OUTSIDE, the Rio Kid struck a match. It showed that in the strip between the gravel path and open window were indentations of high-heeled boots. Some had been left by the Rio Kid and his friends as they stood there, looking in.

They withdrew to their home where the Rio Kid summed up the situation.

"With Duke Anson dead, gents," he said, "all we got to go on is suspicion. It's a mighty ticklish situation, and calls for careful thinkin'. We may end up dancin' on the coals with Duke Anson if we go off half-cocked. I believe Anson died because he blabbed to you, Mills.

"But how can we prove it?" Bob Pryor went on. "One thing's certain—we got to watch Yates Dorgan and that contractor he's brought in. But first, we got to insure our own hides. After this, we keep guard here while we're sleepin'. We'll go it two men to a night, so's we'll all have a full sleep every other twenty-four hours. You all turn in now, and I'll stand the first tour."

The Rio Kid sat in the darkness, on a soapbox, outside the little shack while the others slept. Alert, his thoughts raced from one matter to another. He thought of Ursula and her father, of the people who had come to educate the youth of Idaho, and of ranchers such as Faber, courageous Americans who had pushed their civilization into the wilderness.

There were decent men in Boise, plenty of them—tradesmen and workers, and those who were charged with government. Yet, as was often the case, where there was wealth and progress, darker elements had hurried in, to prey upon the honest. Gunmen, killers and thieves thronged to take what they could, by guile or force, while the taking was good, before the Territory shook down to a settled, orderly condition. There were plenty of shrewd customers, wagging woolly tails as though they were the most innocent lambs, the proverbial disguise concealing the wolfish pelts of their real nature.

"Lot of money in that education game," mused the Rio Kid. "It would attract the itchin'-fingered."

He might have thought of that before, had he not been engrossed in enjoying life in Boise, where he had become a town hero because of his handling of the Bannack Jake affair.

Dorgan! There was a man, he thought. He frowned, his brain clicking busily. Elegant, superior, Dorgan was apparently wealthy, without any signs of where his income had come from until he had bought the El Dorado.

A possible hypothesis struck him with full force.

"Why, the son took over that den right after the perfessor's bunch bought the land! And Anson claimed he only got a small slice!"

At dawn, Celestino came out, and relieved the Rio Kid. He went to sleep, and when he woke around ten o'clock, he was refreshed and ready to move.

After breakfast, he saddled Saber, and, with Sieber, rode out to the tract of land which the university had bought. Lew Mills had already gone out there, with Ursula and her father.

It was a busy, bustling spot. Carpenters and others were setting up temporary buildings. Some tents had been pitched, and brush and excess trees had been cut off. Well-diggers were delving into the ground after water.

Below was Boise, pulsing with new life. With its bracing air, and the beauty of the surrounding mountain scenery, with the vast stretch of the Snake River plains to the south, Boise was a jewel among cities. Redrock Creek wandered through its valley, to the ranching sections.

Only a few short years before this had been wilderness, bloody Indian ground. But the discovery of gold had drawn men as a magnet draws filings, and now they were hungry for land, loving it, fighting jealously for the good earth which fed them, healed them, on which they lived and died.

The unwilling savages had been pushed back into the mountains. The Nez Perce tribe for the time being were quiescent, apparently wanting only peace. The white settlers could go about taming the huge interior of the continent, the heart of America.

Yates Dorgan and the contractor, Frederick Tenny, were on hand, moving about the property, talking with Professor Vandort. Now and then, Tenny would drive a stake as though to mark a building site. Ursula and Lew Mills were sitting in the shade of a big oak. She was busily crocheting, while Mills watched her, and talked to her.

"Want to lay a little bet?" asked Al Sieber suddenly.

"What's that, Al?" asked the Rio Kid.

"Give yuh ten to one that Mills waltzes to the altar with that beautiful lady perfessor."

"What makes yuh so shore?" The Rio Kid grinned. "I ain't licked yet."

"Mebbe Mills don't talk her lingo, but he's quick, and he's young enough to pick it up, and whatever else she wants to teach him. He ain't set, either. He was too young for the big war, and you'n me, while we ain't but a few years older, got our ideas about things. I like excitement and danger, and so do you. Yuh'll pine away to a shadder without it. I just can't see yuh roped and curried and goin' to church regular with the wife and young 'uns."

A BITTER darkness shadowed the Rio Kid's soul. Now and then he felt its hand on his proud, lonely heart. But he knew Sieber was right, though he wouldn't admit it.

"I'll take that bet," he snapped. "I'm goin' over and talk to her. There's some things I want to find out."

Ursula smiled as Sieber and the Rio Kid dismounted, dropped their reins, and came to her side. Mills was in a high good humor. Alzina had faded to a childhood shadow in his young mind. He was beside the girl who now held his heart, and in his money-belt he had several thousand dollars.

"I don't approve of gambling," Ursula was telling him. "But out here on the Frontier, people have a different slant on things. And for a good cause I suppose it's all right. You've been lucky, Lew, but you know you could lose it all in a night."

"Yes'm," Mills said meekly. "I'm not a professional."

Sieber nudged the Rio Kid, but maintained a solemn demeanor. They sat down on the dry grass near where Ursula's toes peeped from under her voluminous skirt.

"Yore dad sets a lot of store in Yates Dorgan, don't he?" the Rio Kid asked her.

Her violet eyes touched his. They were youthfully innocent, yet she had a woman's intuitions.

"Oh, yes," she said. "Mr. Dorgan has been so helpful and kind."

"Yore dad savvied him before he come to Idaho?"

Ursula shook her head.

"No. We met him here in Boise. At the hotel where we stayed."

"I s'pose he told yuh he was out here for his health."

"Yes. He came from New York. He's quite well-off, but had to leave his business back East when he was taken sick. Idaho has done wonders for him."

"It shore has," Sieber softly agreed.

The Rio Kid frowned at the scout. He wanted to learn all he could about Dorgan, and what Dorgan had told the Vandorts, curious to know how Dorgan had obtained such a hold on the professor. Evidently it had been a case of strangers in a startlingly new environment being aided by someone already on the spot.

"Mr. Dorgan helped us get the land we wanted so much," continued Ursula.

GENERAL WILLIAM TECUMSEH SHERMAN

SHERMAN was born in Ohio, and when a young man attended West Point, graduating in 1840 in time to fight in the Mexican War. When the Civil War broke out, Sherman was a tall, spare, red-haired, red-bearded fellow. President of a Louisiana military academy. He wept when war began for he loved the South, and his closest friends were Southerners.

He felt he must choose the Union, however, and left the South, to become one of Grant's most trusted Generals. He is known for the terrible march through Georgia, when Sherman and his "bummers" cut the South in twain. For this, and the ruthless destruction of their cities, many Southerners have never forgiven Sherman.

He is credited with the saying, "War is hell," and Sherman should have known if any man did. After the war, with Grant in the White House, Sherman was made full general and Commander-in-Chief of the Army. In this capacity he traveled widely, and visited the new Territory of Idaho, and inspected the Boise barracks.

Sherman was a great talker. He had an easy manner, and was seldom without a cigar. He had a habit of flipping the tip of his small finger against the end of the cigar even when it was not lighted. It was a mannerism which marked him with many, as great as his extraordinary ability in his field.

He died in 1891.

"And he's so attentive to Father."

"Did yore dad sign up with that Tenny feller yet, for the buildin'?"

"Not yet. But Mr. Dorgan recommends him so highly I don't think there's any doubt the committee will accept his bids. There have been others, but Father trusts Mr. Dorgan, and he has a great deal of influence."

"When'll they decide, yuh reckon?" asked the Rio Kid.

"The committee will meet Monday evening," she replied.

"That gives me three days," thought the Rio Kid.

A thieving contractor could make a fortune out of the university. Poor materials, shoddy construction, rebates to the contractor by favored subcontractors, and other graft, would line the builder's pockets. Money was flowing in from the public, and the city was talking of a large subsidy

for Vandort's project. . . .

That night, the Rio Kid embarked on his secret investigation of Yates Dorgan. He was aware that he was flirting with sudden death, for Dorgan had power, and Boise was a dangerous spot for the man who had led the attack on Bannack Jake. Two attempts on his life had been made, and the Rio Kid did not doubt there would be more.

The El Dorado was going full-blast at midnight, the witching hour for those who liked such sport, and for those who preyed on them.

It had been easy enough to learn where Dorgan's office and private quarters were, on the second floor in the rear. An outside wooden stairs led from the rear street to the office, while inside were flights in front and rear.

The problem was to get within earshot of Dorgan's rooms without arousing suspicion. The Rio Kid had figured he could not go up the stairs, either inside or out, without being observed, and if Dorgan was alert, he would have watchers at strategic spots. But the Rio Kid had his eye on a store roof, with a large sign hiding it from the street, which leaned against the side wall of the El Dorado.

Hidden down the block, were Lew Mills and Celestino, in case reinforcements were needed. Al Sieber and the Rio Kid, wearing moccasins, reached the far side of the store, and Sieber boosted the Rio Kid up till he could pull himself to the store roof. He lay flat, giving a hand to bring Sieber up beside him.

THERE were lighted windows on the second floor of the El Dorado, but heavy curtains screened most of them, and they knew they had not been seen. They crept across to the back, where the two structures touched, and Sieber again gave the Rio Kid a hand to reach the flat roof of the El Dorado. Sieber curled up behind a brick chimney, while the Rio Kid tiptoed to the rear of the El Dorado roof, just over Dorgan's office windows.

The roof was covered with sheet metal, a precaution against fires which sometimes swept Frontier cities with devastating results. Heavy thuddings told of dancers below. Music, and the hoarse or shrill cries of merrymakers, reached the Rio Kid as he lay on his stomach. It might be a long wait, but he had counted on that.

The time dragged but the Rio Kid had learned Indian patience in his work as a scout. He stayed where he was, for the office windows were open in the warmth of the night. By hanging over the edge a bit, he could almost look in through the top of the window.

He figured it must be after one o'clock when suddenly he tensed, as he heard a door latch snap.

Men came into Dorgan's office, and he heard Dorgan's familiar voice.

"Sit down and take the load off your feet," he heard Dorgan order. "I'm worn out, Jake. I think I'll turn in early tonight."

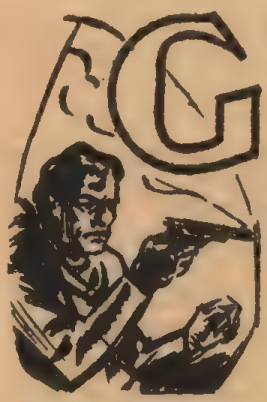
"Me, too," said another voice, a harsh voice. "I was up early, runnin' around with the perfessor. Lucky I savvy how to talk a carpenter's lingo, ain't it? My dad whaled the tar out of me when I was a kid, makin' me learn the trade. Never liked such work, though."

"That's why I picked you, Jake. Besides, we've worked together before so we trust each other. I didn't want to take a chance on drawing another Anson, the stupid fool!"

Frozen in position, the Rio Kid knew what he had come upon. The second man was the contractor, Fred Tenny, and Dorgan addressed him as "Jake"!

CHAPTER IX

Exposed



GLASSES tinkled as the two men in the office below the listening Rio Kid had a drink.

"Yuh reckon that there committee'll give me the contract?" he heard Jake ask.

"I guarantee it," said Dorgan.

Annoyingly, sounds from the saloon and dance hall swelled louder, as the wind puffed that way, and drowned out some of the conversation. Then the Rio Kid heard:

"S'posin' somebody else bids lower?"

"Vandort eats out of my hand—told him

you'd do better job—he'll convince 'em."

"—savvy the tricks." That was Tenny boasting—or Jake, as Dorgan called him. "Plenty of ways to profit. Ought to make a cool hunderd thousan' apiece, with no danger, Dorgan."

"One thing worries me."

"What's that?"

"The Rio Kid and his bunch. How much did that fool Anson spill before we caught him?" Dorgan was earnest.

"Why worry? We got plenty men. Let's get Mills and that Rio Kid cuss—pronto!"

A wave of noise broke in, and the Rio Kid silently cursed the merrymakers below. Then words came again.

"Look, Jake. All depends on our front, on our looking honest. I've worked hard, convincing Vandort and all. I'm hirin' more and more good fightin' men, but it's better if we keep our noses clean."

Soon after, Tenny—or Jake—took his leave. But the Rio Kid had heard plenty. He snaked back and signaled Sieber, who helped him to the store roof and down, and they rejoined Mireles and Lew Mills.

"Well," Mills asked eagerly, "did you find out anything?"

"Did I!" exclaimed the Rio Kid. "Wait'll I roll a quirly and I'll give it to yuh."

Mills and Mireles listened with amazement as the Rio Kid retailed what he had learned.

"Tenny's real name is Jake!" gasped Mills. "Do you suppose—"

"I'm right shore that Frederick Tenny is Bannack Jake, shaved, curried and fixed up. Him and Dorgan are old bunkmates. Dorgan used Duke Anson to get his hooks into the money paid for the college land, but they finally had to kill Anson to shut him up. For the contractin' trick Dorgan had to have an hombre he could depend on, and Bannack Jake's it.

"I pinked Jake in that night fight, and no doubt he came to Boise, where Dorgan helped him and hid him till his hurt healed. Jake's men have been driftin' here, too, and Dorgan's took 'em on. They're the ones who tried to gun us, Al. Naturally Bannack Jake and his gang are sore at us."

"What would Jim Reynolds give if he could get this for that paper of his!" explained Al Sieber.

"We've got to watch out there's no leak till we're ready and shore," cautioned the Rio Kid. "We have to prove legal-like that Tenny is Bannack Jake. Speakin' of Reynolds, I trust him, and I believe he'll be able to identify Jake. We must save Vandort and his teachers from the trimmin' Dorgan has planned for 'em. I'm goin' to warn the perfessor against Dorgan and Tenny."

They were cautious about returning to their shack, checking carefully before entering, but the dark little cabin had not been disturbed.

"They ain't ready for us yet," said the Rio Kid. "But this is the last night I spend here. After this, I sleep in the monte."

The others were in full agreement. Mireles took the first guard tour, while the rest turned in.

Early next morning, while the mountain dew was still fresh on the fields about the city, the Rio Kid called on James Reynolds. The editor of the *Statesman* was busy working on a news article.

"I'm puzzled about Duke Anson, Rio Kid," Reynolds said. "They say he killed himself—left a note and all. But the city marshal told me he found some footprints outside Anson's window."

"Some of 'em were mine," drawled the Rio Kid, pulling up a chair.

"What? You don't mean—"

"No, I didn't kill Anson, but I got a good idea who did. Now listen careful, and don't blow off steam till I finish."

The Rio Kid glanced around, to make certain no one was listening. Printers were setting up type, in the main shop, where rolls of newsprint stood ready. Mechanics were oiling and checking the presses.

REYNOLDS clasped his enormous hands behind his head, and leaned back in his swivel chair as he listened to the Rio Kid's story. His eyes widened shrewdly as he heard the startling accusations made by the Rio Kid.

"This Tenny is really Bannack Jake, the outlaw, and Dorgan's his pard," the Rio Kid said flatly. "They killed Anson, who talked too much in his cups, savvy? I believe Dorgan had the original owner of that tract of land done away with, so's he could have Anson pose as the titleholder and get the money from Vandort.

Dorgan used most of it to buy the El Dorado, but he sees big profits in cheatin' the college, so he's rung in Bannack Jake."

"This is tremendous!" cried Reynolds, chair coming forward with a bang as he sprang to his feet. "You're sure of this?"

"I'd take an oath on it. I came to you because yuh claim yuh can identify Bannack Jake, Reynolds."

"I can, I can!"

"Haven't yuh seen this Fred Tenny, the contractor feller?"

"I've seen Tenny, but I wasn't looking for Jake in him. But now you mention it, Tenny could be the bandit. I'll tell you definitely, when I see him again."

"He should be at the school grounds later today. Why don't yuh show up, lookin' to see how the college is comin' along?"

"What a story!" gloated the editor, his eyes glowing.

"But yuh can't print it till we got Bannack Jake, remember," said the Rio Kid. "We don't want Dorgan and Jake on the prod till we're set. Yuh've got to be plumb shore yuh don't let anything leak out too soon."

The editor promised, and the Rio Kid took his leave.

About ten o'clock that sunny morning, the Rio Kid rode across the fields toward Vandort's tent headquarters. The professor was seated in a folding chair before a table made of a box and board. He was studying building plans, and his thoughts were far away.

Some of his associates were at hand, busy. All was bustling activity.

"Mornin', Perfessor," said the Rio Kid pleasantly, as he dismounted and approached the scholar.

Vandort greeted him cordially, though absent-mindedly. Across the field, the Rio Kid saw Dorgan and Tenny.

"Yuh aimin' to give Tenny the buildin' job, Doc?" he inquired.

"I'm sure we will," Vandort answered. "He's most obliging, and Dorgan considers him the best there is."

The Rio Kid asked no more for the present, but lounged nearby, fixing a smoke. After a time James Reynolds came, riding up on the gentle white mare he kept at the livery stable near his office. Dorgan and Tenny strolled over.

Reynolds dismounted and, smiling, thrust an enormous hand toward Tenny.

"Good mornin', Tenny. I'm here to get a special story from you, for I understand you're to be chief contractor for the university. Nothin' too technical, you know, but somethin' along your line."

The contractor blinked, as Reynolds pumped his arm and began putting questions to him. Dorgan stood by, prompting from time to time. When Reynolds had finished, Tenny wiped sweat from his brow, and hurried off, pleading work, trailed by Dorgan.

The Rio Kid drew aside with Reynolds.

"It's Bannack Jake," the editor said, in a low, excited voice. "I'll swear to him."

"How you savvy?" asked the Rio Kid.

"By his right hand. When I met Bannack Jake up north, he had lost the end of his little finger in a knife fight, and there were two deep gashes in the side of the hand. When we shook, I could see and feel the old injury!"

"I'm goin' to speak to Vandort," the Rio Kid said grimly.

As they stood before the professor, he regarded them with kindly blue eyes. The Rio Kid acted as spokesman, while Reynolds backed him up.

"We've got important news, Perfessor Vandort. Listen careful. This Tenny hombre, the contractor Dorgan's pushin' on you, is a notorious outlaw named Bannack Jake, who's wanted for killin's and robberies. Dorgan ain't to be trusted. I savvy it's a shock to yuh, but he aims to shear yuh."

Vandort's chin dropped. He was unable to believe his ears.

"But—it can't be! There must be some absurd mistake. How can you say such things? Dorgan is my friend, my trusted aide. Why, he's been with us from the very start of our venture here."

"The Rio Kid's right," insisted Reynolds. "You've been taken in, Vandort. I know that Tenny is Bannack Jake. They mean to cheat you and your people—all of the public who've contributed to the good cause you represent."

VANDORT brushed his bearded chin with a trembling hand, speechless.

"I—I don't know what to say, gentlemen," he at last said dazedly. "Perhaps Tenny deceived Dorgan. That must be it. Why, Dorgan has been my right hand here! He's assistant treasurer, and has

collected perhaps more than any other individual."

"I'll bet he has," growled the Rio Kid.

"He—he even put in money of his own."

"A blind, to fool you," Reynolds said impatiently. "He knew he'd get it back, and plenty more with it."

The Rio Kid nudged the editor. Perhaps something about Vandort, showing his distress, had warned Yates Dorgan, for he came hurrying back across the field with Bannack Jake in tow.

It was immediately plain that Vandort could not dissemble well. The professor, honest as the day was long, found it hard to believe ill of others, and could not hide his emotions. His face was flushed, and he trembled perceptibly.

"What's wrong, Vandort?" demanded Dorgan sharply. "Are you ill?"

"I—these gentlemen—" quavered Vandort, in a sick voice.

Dorgan's glance glinted with sudden venom as he met the steady eyes of the Rio Kid.

"What is it?" snapped Dorgan.

Bannack Jake was alarmed. Always on the alert, fearing arrest, his hand rose toward his belt, where his shirt bulged from his hidden gun. The Rio Kid plainly noted the stubby small finger of the hand, the whitish scars.

There was one way to convince Vandort. Besides, the Rio Kid did not wish to let Bannack Jake have an opportunity to flee from Boise. Also, he was hoping to stampede Yates Dorgan into an overt act, for as yet he had no proof except his own word against the saloon owner, and Dorgan was powerful in the city.

"Reach, Bannack Jake!" the Rio Kid snapped sharply.

The supposed contractor whirled, swearing, but his gun hand paused at the point where his Colt was concealed. Looking into the black muzzle of the Rio Kid's revolver, he put up both hands.

"What's the meanin' of this, you fool?" Dorgan blazed at the Rio Kid.

"I'm arrestin' yore pard, Bannack Jake, Dorgan. I'm takin' him to the city to lock him up."

Dorgan held on to himself with a visible effort. But he knew he had the power to fight, once he was out from under the Rio Kid's Colt.

Men on the other side of the lot, supposed workers who had come with Bannack Jake and Dorgan, saw the prisoner, with his raised hands, the sunlight sheening on the Rio Kid's pistol. Quickly they consulted together. Instantly ten men produced revolvers from under their clothing and came galloping over, to save Bannack Jake.

CHAPTER X

Arrest

EDITOR Reynolds drew a huge horse pistol from a shoulder holster, while the Rio Kid gave out shrill whistles. The furious Dorgan, his long nose twitching as though jointed at the end, slowly backed off.

"Tell yore pards to stand back!" snapped the Rio Kid, as he kept the dangerous outlaw covered. "Jake, you and Dorgan'll be first to go down if they start shootin'."

In response to the Rio Kid's signal, Al Sieber, Celestino Mireles and Lew Mills dashed from a thicket. They were mounted and armed with carbines, and galloped up quickly.

Yates Dorgan folded his arms, refusing to say anything, but though he kept his chin up, there was fear of the Rio Kid in his eyes.

"Go on, fellers—get away!" Bannack Jake bawled, aware that he would die if Pryor lifted his thumb from the gun hammer.

The would-be rescuers stopped short, watching as Bannack Jake was hurried to a waiting horse. Mireles had brought Saber, and the Rio Kid mounted the dun. With his friends, Bob Pryor headed for the city, with Reynolds in tow to act as a witness, and Bannack Jake as well, whose gun had now been removed from its hidden sheath.

"It's up to you now," the Rio Kid informed the editor. "You'll have to convince the judge this hombre is Bannack Jake. I was hopin' Dorgan would panic and go for his gun. I'd liked to 've had it out with him, but I couldn't shoot a man

down in cold blood."

"I'll cook Dorgan brown on both sides," promised Reynolds.

"Lookin' at it cool-like," went on the Rio Kid, "we ain't got much on Dorgan that'll stand up in a court. You saw how Perfessor Vandort took it. He's such a good-hearted old coot he believes Bannack Jake fooled Dorgan—and Dorgan'll put it thataway. Only way we can get Dorgan is to break Bannack Jake and get him to talkin'."

Reynolds rubbed his enormous hands together.

"The pen is sometimes mightier than a Colt," he said. "Dorgan is my meat. I'll tear him to shreds in my paper."

They escorted Bannack Jake down Idaho Street to the town lockup, behind the City Hall. There were six cubicles in its cell-block. Last night's drunks occupied three of the cells, and Bannack Jake was locked up in a fourth one.

"This is Saturday," said Reynolds, as they paused outside the jail. "Court won't sit till Monday morning. Let Bannack Jake cool his heels till then. Now I've got to hustle, to get the paper out this afternoon. This story's too good to hold."

The Rio Kid and his three comrades returned to the site of the proposed university. Dorgan and the men who had come there with Bannack Jake had left. So had Vandort. They were told that he had gone home to lie down, for he was feeling ill.

"Yuh s'pose Dorgan'll try to snatch Bannack Jake out of jail?" suggested Sieber.

"Not durin' the day," said the Rio Kid. "I figger they'll wait and see what happens when court holds Monday mornin'. It's up to us to make shore Bannack Jake don't escape, savvy? As long as we got him, Dorgan knows he's in danger, for Jake can wreck him."

"I'm starved," said Lew Mills. "Let's eat."

They went boldly into the El Dorado, for drinks and a meal. They did not see Yates Dorgan there.

"Lyin' low, I reckon," said the Rio Kid. "Figgerin' what to do next. Well, we got to be ready for him."

The *Idaho Statesman* appeared late in the afternoon, with its startling headlines. Lounging near the City Hall, across from Reynolds' office, the Rio Kid, Al Sieber and Mireles, watched the excitement it caused, and bought papers to read what Reynolds had written about Yates Dorgan. The bold headline read:

A SNAKE IN OUR GRASS!

The story which followed said:

Yates Dorgan, well-known proprietor of the El Dorado and man-about-Boise, has been exposed as a bosom companion of the worst desperado ever to infest our fair Territory! The name of this blight on the human race is Jacob Riggs, better known to his unfortunate victims as Bannack Jake. Recently this outlaw's gang, preying on ranchers, and on travelers on the highways, was smashed by the courageous Captain Robert Pryor, the Rio Kid.

Bannack Jake fled sniveling to his old crony, Dorgan, who hid him till his wounds had healed. Together they concocted a foul plot to milk the university out of the large funds which have been collected by public subscription. Disguised as a reputable contractor, under the alias of Frederick Tenny, Bannack Jake ingratiated himself into the good graces of those charged with administering the money.

Through the vigilance of Captain Pryor, who has done Boise another great favor, Bannack Jake has been arrested and now lies moldering in our city lockup.

Yet, reprehensible as this cowardly gunman and robber Bannack Jake may be, this writer must here inject that he has never in all his long years as a journalist come upon such a snake in the grass as Yates Dorgan. Concealed behind a respectable, high-toned front, Dorgan has lied and wheedled his way into the hearts of our decent citizens. This wolf in sheep's clothing, Dorgan, deserves to be lashed, driven from our midst!

"Whew!" said Sieber. "What a tongue-twister that Reynolds is."

REYNOLDS excoriated Dorgan for column after column, sparing nothing.

It was Saturday afternoon, and the city was crowded. Cowboys were in from the range, shoppers had come from outlying sections, and the town began to buzz as the news flashed around that Dorgan had been exposed as an associate of Bannack Jake's, that the infamous outlaw himself was under arrest.

In front of the El Dorado, a large gathering, milling about, had the makings of a lynch mob, lacking only leaders. One of the men was a leathery cowboy, with a cheek bulged by a tobacco cud,

and another was a huge man in miner's getup.

"This here Dorgan deserves a rope's end, fellers!" bawled the miner. "My pard here, Nevady, has got it! Hold her up, Nevady!"

The cowboy waved his lariat, and the surging crowd began to cheer.

"Lynch Dorgan!" someone shouted, and that set off the riot.

The Rio Kid and Sieber were swept up in the crush as the cowboy and the miner hit the porch of the El Dorado. But evidently Dorgan had been ready for such a move. Men with sawed-off shotguns were inside the saloon, and others were behind the bar, with carbines and Colts. The few customers hastily ducked for cover, but the mob paused. The foremost did not like the looks of the raised shotguns, or of the toughs who held them.

Presently Yates Dorgan appeared, coming down the front stairs. He was elegantly clad, as usual, and seemed unruffled. His dark eyes were cool, as they fixed the hooting crowd.

The booing and catcalls drowned him out, as he started to speak. He shrugged, waited.

"Drag him out!"

"Rope him!"

"String him to his own rafters!"

Men in the rear of the mob pushed forward, but those under the shotguns shoved back. Two or three fights started between hot-tempered mob members.

When they quieted, Dorgan raised his hand, again trying to speak. At last his voice rose over the dying tumult.

"Reynolds is a liar, folks! I'll prove it and vindicate myself. Meanwhile, any man who wants to lynch me, just step into the saloon."

No one moved. Faced by bristling guns in broad daylight, the mob was cowardly.

"I'll show Boise I'm an honest man," Dorgan went on, in loud but dignified tones. "I'll sue Reynolds for libel and make him retract his lies. He has a grudge against me, for he demanded graft from the college in the form of highly-paid advertisements, which I refused. I was fooled by Bannack Jake, who posed as Tenny, the contractor, just as others were. Now, drinks at the bar'll be free for the next hour. You're all welcome here, so long as you keep orderly, and no one will be hurt."

Dorgan turned and walked back up the stairs to his quarters.

"He carried it off mighty well, Al," said the Rio Kid, with grudging admiration.

"Shore," growled Sieber. "He's got a passel of fighters lined up in there and he's been quietly hirin' more and more."

Some of the men in the mob went into the saloon, lining up at the bar to take advantage of the free whisky. Dorgan had shaken the conviction of many. Perhaps he had been framed by a vituperative penman, they thought.

But the cowboy and the miner who had led the mob still thirsted for blood. The big miner leaped to the saloon porch.

"Say, boys," he shouted, "why don't we go give Bannack Jake what he's got comin'? Save the law the expense!"

Many were in favor of this, roused to blood-lust by the mob spirit.

"We better get to the jail and help the marshals protect their prisoner," said the Rio Kid. "I ain't in favor of mobs—and we need Bannack Jake, anyways, to pin Dorgan right."

[*Turn page*]

BEST WESTERN FICTION IN OUR COMPANION MAGAZINES

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On their horses, the Rio Kid, Sieber and Mireles beat the mob to the jail, in time to warn the marshal on duty, who called his aides, by means of a shrill whistle. Those within hearing hurried toward the center of the trouble.

AS THE mob appeared, headed toward the City Hall, they saw the Rio Kid, with Sieber on one side of him, and the Mexican on the other, standing between them and the lockup, while the city marshals stood waiting at the open windows.

Howls rose on the warm afternoon air.

"Bring out Bannack Jake! We want Bannack Jake!"

But the Rio Kid was known in Boise, and the determined stance of the three at the door, the guns of the marshals guarding the prisoner, all helped to stop the mob.

"All right, boys," called the Rio Kid. "You know we're no friends of Bannack Jake's, but he ain't bein' lynched. We aim to give him a fair trial, legal-like. And we expect he'll help convict Yates Dorgan."

The starch had been taken out of the mob at the El Dorado, and after some cursing and grumbling, the men forming it dispersed. Many hurried back toward Dorgan's, for free drinks.

"I didn't notice any of Dorgan's bunch tryin' to keep 'em from lynchin' Bannack Jake," the Rio Kid remarked. "Mebbe Dorgan wouldn't've felt too bad if they'd choked his pard before Jake could talk!"

"It's a ticklish business, Rio Kid," warned Sieber. "Dorgan means to fight. We got friends around Boise, but if we're caught off guard, we won't be able to call on 'em. Dorgan's boss of a big, tough bunch."

"Dorgan's got to take care of Bannack Jake one way or another," declared the Rio Kid. "He'll try to snatch him, mebbe, if the judge holds him. We got to be on our hosses night and day."

The chief marshal promised to keep extra guards on duty until Monday morning, when Bannack Jake would be arraigned. That night, Boise howled, excited by the events of the day. But Dorgan stayed at the El Dorado, with his fighters, and no attempt was made to rescue the captive outlaw from the lockup.

CHAPTER XI

Dorgan Strikes

SUNDAY, too, passed without trouble. At ten o'clock Monday morning, the Rio Kid was in the courtroom with James Reynolds, Sieber, Mills and Celestino. The room was filled with spectators who had come to see the sport, as Bannack Jake was brought to face the bar of justice.

The clerk rang a bell.

"Rise! Here comes Hizzoner!"

Judge Egbert Coombs entered, a flowing black robe swathing his small, frail body. He was about sixty, a man with gray hair, and deep-socketed, quick blue eyes. He took his seat, rapping for order. The room quieted and, after two celebrants from Saturday night had been fined, Bannack Jake was brought in, handcuffed.

The outlaw had shaved and had on his sober dark suit. He looked sure of himself, although he put on a show of meekness.

Judge Coombs frowned at the prisoner.

"You are charged with homicide. Have you an attorney?"

"Yes, suh. I represent the unfortunate victim of mistaken identity, Your Honor." A stout man, overflowing his gray suit, and wearing a flowing black tie, stood up.

"Who's that?" the Rio Kid whispered to Reynolds.

"Arnold Burke," replied Reynolds. "He's a mighty clever lawyer but none too finicky about the cases he takes. He defends most of the killers and thieves brought in."

Burke had quite an impressive manner, and gestured with white hands as he talked. He draped a fat arm over the end of the bar, waiting while the prosecutor, a thin man with a hatchet face and a belligerent air, began his attack on Bannack Jake.

Reynolds and the Rio Kid were called to identify the prisoner. Burke kept interrupting, jumping up to object as though the witnesses were telling the most atrocious falsehoods and he could prove it.

"That's hearsay!" he screamed. "You can't hold my client on such a tissue of lies!"

Judge Coombs rapped sharply with his gavel.

"Order—quiet! Sit down, Burke!"

But again and again Burke leaped up to yell objections. Coombs was irritated, and his seamed face was growing red, for it was plain he did not like Arnold Burke.

As Burke once more broke in on the Rio Kid, who was giving details about Bannack Jake, Judge Coombs lost all patience. He jumped to his feet, pointed a shaking finger at Burke, and began to curse the outlaw's attorney. The courtroom listened, fascinated by the brilliant exhibition of Frontier profanity which the judge loosed on Burke's head.

"Ahem!" Run down, Judge Coombs cleared his throat and resumed his magisterial seat. "I hereby fine myself fifty dollars for contempt of Court." Solemnly he peeled off money from a roll he extracted from his wallet. "If there had been ladies in court, it would have been a hundred!" He scowled at Burke. "But it was worth it! Go on with the case, gents."

At the end of the hearing, Bannack Jake was bound over on a homicide charge, and returned to his cell. The outlaw had refused to admit his identity, or to talk. He was well aware that the powerful Dorgan must save him.

Reynolds went back to work in his office across the street and Lew Mills rode toward Vandort's. The Rio Kid, Sieber and Mireles repaired to a saloon which had a hot free lunch counter. They spent a pleasant hour in the place.

As they emerged, the Rio Kid pointed down the street.

"Look, boys! That gang goin' into the *Statesman!* It's some of Dorgan's strong-arm bunch. Come on! They may be after Reynolds!"

He ran along the wooden sidewalk, with the other two at his heels.

From the office came a terrific commotion, howls and bangings. A Colt echoed inside the building. Two Dorgan fighters, at the street entry, saw the Rio Kid coming, and one of them whipped his pistol from its sheath. In a hasty draw the Rio Kid beat the man to the shot. His slug tore into the bearded gunslinger's shoulder, doubled him up, his face twisted in pain. The other Dorgan man jumped inside as a bullet from Sieber's pistol ripped a long splinter from the door frame.

The office fronted on the street, and the windows were wide open. The Rio Kid saw struggling figures in there, heard Reynolds' hoarse voice cursing. Vaulting through the window, the Rio Kid landed in a crouch, his revolver cocked.

A DOZEN toughs had come to punish Jim Reynolds for having dared attack Yates Dorgan in his newspaper. The editor had been thrown to the splintery floor, and they were all over him, like a pack of terriers after a captured cat, kicking him with heavy boots, punching him, hitting him with short clubs.

The man the Rio Kid had wounded, and the other who had dodged Sieber's bullet, were yelling a warning, which had distracted the gang for a moment as the Rio Kid came in the window. He was close to Reynolds' desk, in front of which Reynolds lay, held down by sheer weight of numbers, but fighting back with all his strength.

"Back off, cuss you!" bawled the Rio Kid, Colt up and hammer spur back under his thumb.

Al Sieber appeared in another window, covering the Rio Kid, while Mireles started through after his General.

It was at that moment that Reynolds' attackers became aware of the Rio Kid's presence, and that his steady gun was in position. They stopped beating Reynolds, who squirmed out from under the pack. The editor's face was dark with fury and his eyes flamed. He threw himself toward the rack where he kept his array of weapons, snatched up a heavy wagon spoke and, with a battle cry, rushed in to belabor the men, bringing the hickory club down indiscriminately over heads, backs and shoulders.

The Rio Kid grinned as he saw Reynolds industriously laying about, swearing a blue streak as he paid for some of the blows which had been dealt him. A trickle of blood issued from the editor's swollen lips, where a sharp boot toe had landed. One eye was half closed, and his face was scratched. His clothing was covered with dust, and one coat sleeve had nearly been ripped from its moorings.

Sieber's pistol roared from the window.

One of the gang from behind the others, had tried to get a gun going.

There was a sudden rush to leave the office. Dorgan's men fought one another to get through the doorway. The Rio Kid sent two slugs over their heads, to hurry them, while Reynolds, bellowing like a maddened bull, used his club on their rear to good advantage.

"Reynolds—come back!" shouted the Rio Kid, as the editor in his blind rage started to follow his foes.

One of the two printers who had rushed in from the shop in the rear had yelled something, but it was lost in the commotion. The Rio Kid had caught the insistent note of alarm, though, and, glancing through the open door to the shop, he saw armed men crowding inside by the back entry. More of Dorgan's crew!

It looked like a trap. They had come to take care of Reynolds and the newspaper he published. The Rio Kid seized the editor by the shoulder.

"Come on, Reynolds! No time to lose. We got to sashay!"

The editor had cleared the doorway with his club, but the Dorgan men, recovering, were drawing their guns. A near miss whizzed past Reynolds' nose, and plugged into the wall. Another cut up the floor between his spread feet.

"Look back there!" yelled the Rio Kid. "It's an army after yuh!"

After one horrified look at the grim armed gunnies invading their domain, the printers ran for a window. The Rio Kid slammed the connecting door shut, and dropped the iron bar bolt.

Sieber was on the sidewalk, shooting steadily.

"General!" panted Mireles, who had helped drive the foe from the office. "Zey cut us off pronto! *Vamos!*"

Reynolds, calmed down a bit, and puffing for breath, obeyed the Rio Kid. He climbed out the window, and Mireles and the Rio Kid quickly followed. Sieber, pressed against the building wall, was preventing the first gang from issuing into the street to cut them off.

"Run for it!" the Rio Kid ordered Reynolds. "Our hosses are in the next block."

With Mireles at his side, he loped after the tall, gangling editor. Sieber was retreating, his hot guns growling, as he shot back. Dorgan gunmen were popping from the door and from the office windows, to send quick ones after them.

They kept close to the building walls, running for it. A couple of marshals raced from the City Hall, and citizens ducked for cover as the battle clanged in the center of the town.

Saber, and the mustangs belonging to Celestino and Sieber, were in front of the nearby saloon. Beside them was a long-legged bay gelding with a Square F brand on it. The Rio Kid lifted the reins from the hitchrail.

"Git aboard, Reynolds! We got to ride for it, before they make sieves out of us all!"

HIS practised eye sized up the situation. There were at least thirty of Dorgan's killers on the prod, and hot after them. In the heat of such a battle, no one could say who had killed the victims left lying in the street.

The Square F horse belonged to Dan Faber, left there no doubt by one of the rancher's cowboys. Faber would not object to its being used, and anyway it was no time to be choosey. As Reynolds mounted, Dorgan fighters were spewing from the newspaper building, trying to pick off the four escaping men.

The Rio Kid, Sieber and Mireles replied, to prevent the enemy from being too ambitious in the chase. They leaped on their horses.

"General!" warned Celestino shrilly. "Look, up ze road!"

A third band of Dorgan men made the turn around the corner into Idaho Street and bore down on them, shouting savagely, guns opening fire.

The town was full of Dorgan's hirelings!

"He's marshaled 'em and hired a big passel over the weekend!" thought the Rio Kid, as he hunted for a way out.

The gang from Reynolds' place had taken to their horses and were cutting across the commons on which stood the City Hall and other public buildings. The air seemed to be filled with murderous lead. Something bit a chunk from the Rio Kid's Stetson, and he felt the whip of it as his hat was ventilated. Saber leaped spasmodically, swearing in horse language, and for an instant the Rio Kid feared his horse had been hit. But it was only a close one, though so near it burned

the dun's hide and furrowed the cantle of the saddle.

The city marshals were shouting futilely as drumming hoofs swept past. The street was empty of citizens now, for no man was willing to risk his life in such a melee.

Al Sieber spurted out ahead.

"Thisaway!" he bellowed. "This side lane's open!"

CHAPTER XII

Flight

PUSHING Jim Reynolds after Sieber, the Rio Kid and Mireles followed swiftly, their Colts snapping back at the pursuers. The Rio Kid, the last to gallop through into a rutted, narrow lane which ran parallel to the river, saw bunches of the enemy peel off, to spur swiftly around to the next crossway.

"Make it fast, boys!" he shouted. "They're aimin' to cut us off!"

The lane took them through to a wider, residential avenue which ran to the river. As they made the corner, fire came from their right, and Reynolds gave a quick cry of pain. Glancing at the editor, the Rio Kid saw that Reynolds' left arm hung limp, and blood, flowing from under his sleeve, was staining his hand.

"How bad, Reynolds?" he called.

Reynolds had his teeth gritted, was riding, controlling his rangy mustang with knees and his right hand.

"I—I'll make it!"

The lane ended, and there was but one way to go—toward Front Street and the river. Some of Dorgan's gang were already pounding along Front, having ridden at breakneck speed around the block to head them off, while marksmen were stationed at strategic points.

"Dorgan figgered it all out," the Rio Kid thought grimly. "He's got the whole downtown covered!"

Bullets hummed past, sent by the approaching half dozen riders. More were coming, baying like hounds about to run down their quarry. And on the right, the Rio Kid saw a man in a black hat raising a carbine. He was afoot, had been waiting there.

The Rio Kid fired, but the jolting pace of Saber spoiled his aim. The carbine of the man in black echoed the shot with its whiplike voice, and Mireles slumped in his seat.

The Rio Kid swerved, teeth ground together, his Colt roaring at the rifleman who had hit the Mexican. The Dorgan killer knifed forward, the carbine flying from his hands as he fell on his face.

Sieber, Reynolds, and the horse with Mireles still hanging on, had swept past. But the whole city seemed to be filled with enemies, intent on finishing off the Rio Kid and his comrades. Then the river bank lay before them, and the shacks and other structures which stood above high-water mark.

Saber overtook Celestino's faltering golden horse. The Rio Kid spoke to the Mexican, but Mireles seemed not to hear. He was riding by instinct, knees clinched in a death hold on the ribs of his mustang. His eyes were closed, and his lips moved, but no sounds came from them.

Pryor snatched at the flaxen maned gelding's reins, and the speed picked up as they reached the drop to the water. Sieber was already urging his horse to breast the current.

They had a brief respite, for they were below the level of the gunfire, as Dorgan's eager killers tore toward the river.

Sieber made the south bank, drew up, his horse shaking water from its hide. Sieber began to shoot across the stream to slow the pursuit. Reynolds trotted his mustang on past Sieber, and the Rio Kid, leading Mireles' mount, pointed at a patch of timber ahead.

They hurried on. But already their enemies were pushing their horses into the river. And now, as Sieber turned his head, the Rio Kid saw a bloody scratch across the fighting scout's leathery, bronzed cheek.

As they fled up the slope from the Boise, with the sun beating down with summer intensity, the Rio Kid looked back over his shoulder, seeing Dorgan men surging up the south bank of the river. In the daylight there was no place they could hide. The buildings of a small ranch were not far off, also the wooden shacks of

farmers who raised their crops near the water. To hole up in such a spot would invite certain death. Dorgan had scores of gunnies after them. No doubt he had placed a blood-money reward on the Rio Kid, and on his aides.

"I was a fool!" he thought bitterly, blaming himself.

He had treated Yates Dorgan too lightly, and with contempt. While he had taken precautions at night, to prevent being dry-gulched, he had led his friends openly through Boise during the day, had gone into court, using legal means to defeat Dorgan and his crew. Dorgan had now shown his teeth, and Boise belonged to him.

WITH Reynolds and the Rio Kid out of the way, Arnold Burke, Bannack Jake's lawyer, should have little difficulty in freeing his client entirely, or on low bail. Dorgan could cover himself, and the public quickly f o r g o t unproved charges such as Reynolds had made in his newspaper against the saloon owner. Dorgan might even manage to regain his hold on Vandort and the school.

The Rio Kid dared not pause, even to check on how badly Mireles was hurt. The jolting of the golden-hided gelding brought groans from the Mexican, but Celestino kept riding. Born to leather, he had been able to ride a mustang before he could toddle.

The city rapidly faded behind them, behind screens of brush and woods. There was smoke in the clear air, smoke from chimneys as peaceable citizens in Boise cooked their noon meal. The country grew wild and stark as the foes doggedly on their trail herded them toward the Snake River thirty miles below Boise. The great plains stretched before them.

Only the excellence of the four horses kept the fleeing men from being overtaken, and slain in the bush. Twice, over-eager gunmen, on fast mustangs, managed to come near enough for real shooting. Sieber disposed of one, and the other fell to the Rio Kid's Colt. After that, the killers stayed together.

Lather stood out on the horses, froth came from bitted mouths. The pace, as miles reeled off, steadied down, for no animal could maintain such a race at the speed with which it had been begun.

The Rio Kid kept hoping the Dorgan crew would give up, turn back, but they were always there, ready to shake a carbine or pistol, to howl taunts. It was necessary for Sieber, in the lead, to pick a way so they would not come up against some deep gully or hill that would block them in a death trap. Reynolds came next, then the Rio Kid, who had attached the Mexican's reins to his own saddle-horn.

By mid-afternoon, even Saber was showing distress. The rough ground, such hard galloping told on the best of horses. Some of the Dorgan gang had dropped out and gone back toward the city, their horses limping.

"Dorgan must have offered a fortune for our hides!" croaked the Rio Kid, his voice hoarse, for the thick dust stuck in his throat like fish glue.

Ahead now he could see clouds over the Snake River, which in an erratic course flowed in a deep canyon across Idaho, finally to empty into the Columbia. The Snake was the wildest of all the rivers of North America, its canyons in spots deeper than the majestic Colorado's, and flowing through a land that in many places was impassable to men. Great waterfalls, comparable to Niagara, roared at the bottom of the tortuous crevice in the earth.

It was called the "River of No Return." The Rio Kid had heard strange, brutal tales of the mighty Snake.

The day seemed endless, though time was moving inexorably. The sun was lower in the sky, and the weary riders prayed for the darkness, when they could hope to elude their pursuers.

The Rio Kid and Sieber had had a little stale water in their canteens. They had given Reynolds several drinks, and the Rio Kid had managed to pour sips between Celestino's pale lips. The Mexican had somewhat recovered, but was still half-dazed. He could not speak much, and in his dark hair there was clotted blood.

The Rio Kid kept bearing east, so they would not be brought up against the Snake's steep banks.

When the sun at last dropped behind the purple mountains, he heaved a sigh of relief. They were run to a frazzle, suffering from fatigue and thirst, and their

horses were done in. Shadows fell, and soon night covered them with a merciful cloak.

They kept going for a time, as stars peeped out in the clear sky, over the great wilderness.

"Got to—rest!" Jim Reynolds was at the end of the tether, and the Rio Kid and Sieber, toughened as they were to hardships, were close to it.

They stopped, and the Rio Kid listened for sounds of pursuit. But he could hear nothing. He did not doubt that the enemy was just as worn out as they were, and glad of the excuse to quit the chase.

HE WENT to hunt water, which they must have. Before the night had fallen, he had taken note of a line of brush and trees, marking a small watercourse. Half a mile off he found it. Getting off his horse, he lay flat and put his face into the rill. Saber drank noisily, but Pryor would not let him drink too much in his overheated state.

With his sweat-soaked shirt, which he dipped in and out of the water, he gave Saber a sponge bath to wash off the worst of the dust and dried foam. Then, filling the canteens, he rode back to where his comrades awaited him.

"Celestino has a crease in his head," reported Sieber, when he had had a drink. "I could feel it with my fingers—didn't want to strike a light. It doesn't seem too deep. He got a touch of concussion, mebbe."

Celestino lay on a blanket from Sieber's roll.

"I—I am all right, General!" he whispered, grateful for the cool water the Rio Kid gave him.

After a time, the Rio Kid led them to the little brook, where they bathed and drank, treating the wounds as best they could. Sieber helped the Rio Kid rub down the tired horses, whose steady, swift legs and superb strength had saved their lives.

They had two ponchos, but only one blanket, which Sieber had chanced to have rolled behind his saddle. They had, of course, left their gear in Boise. It was growing chilly as the earth lost the sun's heat. Covering up as best they could, the four slept in utter exhaustion.

The Rio Kid awoke at the touch of dawn, stiff from cold. He rose, and Sieber stirred, but Reynolds snored on, while Mireles lay quiet. The Rio Kid looked quickly about, to make sure none of Dorgan's killers were near. Then he checked the horses which had been hobbled close at hand.

A few stale biscuits found in their saddle-bags made up breakfast. Mireles felt better. In the new light, they washed his scalp wound and bound it with a strip of undershirt. Reynolds had been lucky. The bullet which had struck his arm had passed through, making a clean hole. But he was weak from shock, as was the Mexican.

"Now what?" he asked, his injured arm gingerly resting on his hip.

"Well, you and Celestino can't go far, that's a cinch," said the Rio Kid. "Yuh'll have to rest a day, anyways. There's water here, and these bushes make a good hidin' place. Al, s'pose you stick here and watch 'em, and I'll go see if I can reach Dan Faber. I doubt if I'd have any luck tryin' to make Boise. I reckon Dorgan has the city covered, in case I do show up."

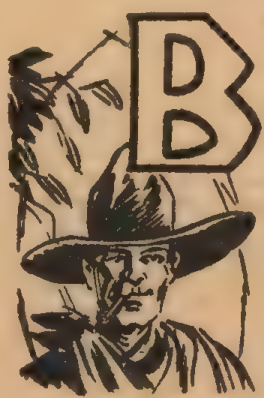
"Yeah," agreed Sieber, "Faber's our best bet. Go to it, Rio Kid."

They breakfasted on crumbs of hardtack.

"Mebbe a jackrabbit'll run across my gunsights before the day's over," said Sieber. "If so, he's as good as stewed."

CHAPTER XIII

Winner Take All



BY THE sun, the Rio Kid started north on the dun, toward the Boise River valley. He thought aloud, as Saber picked up speed.

"Dorgan's in control in Boise, Saber. He's got plenty of help—Bannack Jake's boys, and his own, and extras he's took on for this job. With Jim Reynolds silenced and us run ragged, there's nobody to rouse the town agin Dorgan."

The Rio Kid was greatly worried over the fate of Lew Mills, whom Dorgan also

hated. Mills might already be dead.

"We'll make the Square F and ask help of Faber," he told the dun. "Then I'll try to find Mills."

He had decided to try to reach the creek on which the Square F lay. It was a long run, because when they had eluded their pursuers the evening before, they had been at least thirty-five miles from the city.

Saber's strong legs ate up distance though.

The sun rose higher, warming them, taking the kinks out of their joints.

Several times the keen-eyed Rio Kid was sure he sighted the dust of horsemen, some miles west of the route he stuck to. They might be Dorgan followers, still searching the fastnesses for the four who had outrun them.

"Hope Sieber stays hid," he mused.

But he could trust Al Sieber, who was as cunning and clever a scout as he had ever known.

Crossing the Boise some miles above the city, the Rio Kid paused to refresh himself and Saber, then hurried on. With the river behind them, he worked over into familiar country, around the road leading to the Square F, and around three P.M. he splashed across the creek and up onto the dirt road.

Ahead lay several more miles, straight riding, and he would be at rancher Faber's home.

He felt relieved, though hunger had made him tighten his belt and his grim, sun-bronzed face was peaked under its coating of dust. Saber was caked with the stuff, and his mane, tail and coat were matted with burs, but there was no time to stop.

On the main road from the gold fields lay the spot where Sieber and the Rio Kid had smelled out Bannack Jake's stronghold, and the place where they had rescued Lew Mills.

When the Rio Kid reached the fork, where a dirt trail branched off to Faber's, he swung the dun into it, galloping at full speed.

The wind was warm with the summer heat, and the brush was thick. As he approached the spot where the trail made a sharp bend, toward one of the fords where the highway crossed the stream, Saber shivered, and rippled the black stripe along his spine—a sure warning that strangers were coming.

The Rio Kid pulled at his reins, to turn aside and let them pass. They might be Dorgan men. But before he could do anything about it, two big riders loomed up, traveling at good speed, and just behind them came a wagon with a coach top, painted black, and with its wheels red-spoked, with yellow rims. The iron-banded wheels on the left hit a jutting rock and the vehicle careened, as the bearded driver on the box cursed and

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THE RIO KID JOINS MARSHAL WYATT

WHEN the Gordons and the Thurmans begin feuding, the result is the bloodiest range war of them all—with both sides hiring just as many hard-bitten, cold-blooded gunnies as possible. Killing follows killing, and all the decent citizens are driven away—so that Happy Valley belies its name and becomes one of the West's most vicious and lawless trouble-spots. Famous Deputy Marshal Wyatt Earp, of Tombstone, takes a hand in the game — with fighting Captain Bob Pryor to side him. Then the Rio Kid is catapulted into some of the fastest action of his colorful career—and bucks dangerous foemen worthy of his mettle—in a Western novel that's packed with action, bristling with suspense, alive with the atsmosphere of the old frontier—a novel filled with surprises and deeds of daring! Never before has the Rio Kid faced a sterner test than in GUNS OF HAPPY VALLEY—a yarn that will hold you breathless from start to finish as you follow him on a trail beset with grim powdersmoke peril!

lashed the snorting four black coach horses.

The Rio Kid had just ducked for the side of the trail when a man stuck his head from the window of the carriage, to say something to the reckless driver. Dorgan!

The picture was painted on the Rio Kid's quick mind even as he reacted. Trained to observe detail, he registered the fact that the wagon wheels were freshly shining with moisture, and the mustangs carrying the outriders were wet to their bellies and there were at least six more, coming along in the dust behind the coach. Quick as the Rio Kid was, they glimpsed him.

"The Rio Kid! There he goes!"

Dorgan hung out of the wagon, a Colt in one hand, as he gripped the upright rail with the other, trying to pick off the flying horseman. His followers veered, hitting the brush and setting up howls. Slugs zipped through the leaves and bushes, hunting for the flying Rio Kid.

He was forced headlong through tearing brush which slapped and cut the dun and himself. Saber slid down a four-foot-high bank, into the creek, stumbled on a red boulder and nearly went down. But the Rio Kid helped the dun right himself. They blundered through the stream, up the other side, getting into the high brakes along the bank.

The Rio Kid kept on up the slope, seeking to outdistance his enemies. Eastward, the valley of the Redrock sloped rapidly to the fastnesses of a frowning, pine-covered mountain range, with a million places in which a man might hide.

THEY ran him for over an hour though they lost sight of him a few minutes after he took to the woods. Face bleeding from the lash of stinging branches, breath panting from the exertion, the Rio Kid eluded his foes.

Pausing to listen, trying to pick out possible sounds of pursuit, he muttered to the dun:

"We'll stick to the monte from here on!"

He bore north by the brilliant streaks of sunlight which penetrated here and there. He could stay in the forests, though it was more difficult going than on the road. Through aisles in high pines, with Saber's hoofs cushioned on the thick needle droppings of a century, the Rio Kid made his way. From time to time, blocked by some break in the underlying rock strata, he had to detour about a bluff or even retrace his way and try another.

"Dorgan'll guess I'm tryin' to reach Faber's!" he told himself. "I'll have to go in mighty careful!"

Just before him a break opened up in the woods. He scouted cautiously, peering up and down the woods road. To his right, it wound up into the mountains, so no doubt woodcutters had made it, bringing timber and fuel to Boise.

[*Turn page*]

EARP IN A CAMPAIGN FOR RANGE JUSTICE!

GUNS OF HAPPY VALLEY

A Complete Bob Pryor Novel

By

LEE E. WELLS

FEATURED IN OUR NEXT GALA ISSUE!

Sunlight slanted in, accentuated by the gloomy, dark-green pines. He could hear nothing, see nothing to menace him, and urged the dun across. As he passed over the grassy trail, he noted the indentations made by a wagon's iron-bound wheels, coming and going.

But he was determined to reach Faber's. With iron will he fought off the faintness that comes from hunger, from long exertion and strain. Teeth gritted, he rode on.

Just before dark, the Rio Kid pulled up in a small patch of timber overlooking Dan Faber's Square F, below him on the creek. He could see the road in from Boise. There were riders on it, slowly patrolling. The setting sun's rays scintillated on glass, and he stared at the point, a mile away.

"Spyglass!" he growled. "They're watchin' the ranch for me to show."

Faber's looked almost deserted, though he saw a woman in a blue dress—he thought it was Mrs. Faber—come from the kitchen with a bucket and go to the trough for water. After a time, the Chinese who cooked for the Fabers emerged with a bucket of slops which he hurled into the chicken pen. There was a wrangler working with mustangs in a corral near the bunkhouse, with a slim lad helping him.

"Mebbe Faber and his cowboys are out workin'," the Rio Kid thought. "They should be home soon."

But when the sun set he hadn't spied Faber or the waddies who rode for him.

When it was dark enough, the Rio Kid left Saber as close to the buildings as he dared, for he was sure that Dorgan's outlaws would creep in nearer the ranch, with the night. Flitting from shadow to shadow, he finally reached the darker side of the house. Through an open window he saw Mrs. Faber sitting by the table in the main room, sewing. Her daughter and the younger boy were with her, the lad working on a lariat, plaiting leather strips into shape.

"Mrs. Faber!"

She started, and the boy jumped to his fet, snatched up a carbine which leaned against the wall.

"It's the Rio Kid," Pryor warned softly.

Faber's wife came to the window.

"Why, land sakes! So it is! What's happened? Dan hasn't been hurt, has he?" There was anxiety in her voice and her face showed her alarm.

"No, ma'am, not that I savvy. Where is he?"

"Where is he? Why, he went to meet you like your note told him to. Dan Junior's gone with him, and all the boys. They left after noon."

Quickly he drew forth the story of the messenger purporting to be from the Rio Kid, and the letter asking Faber to fetch all his friends to a point miles away, on the north road.

"Dan said you'd cornered another big rustler band!" Mrs. Faber said. "He picked up men from the Slanting L and the Circle Two on his way."

The Rio Kid felt close to panic. He had fought through to Faber's, sure that he could obtain the help he needed. But Dorgan had thought of everything!

The Rio Kid's eyes were red from dust and lack of sleep. Usually spick-and-span, he needed a shave, and sticky clay had stained his face.

He did get food, though, which Mrs. Faber brought from the kitchen and handed to him through the window. He refused to go inside, for Dorgan men were skulking around and would like nothing better than to see him in a lighted room. Besides, he did not wish to jeopardize the lives of Mrs. Faber and her children in a gunfight.

CROUCHED in the shadow, he wolfed down roast beef, potatoes, slabs of buttered bread, and a pail of warm coffee. The meal braced him.

He took his leave of the Fabers then, for he could not waste any time. But he decided that to follow Faber and the Redrock cowmen would be a wild-goose chase.

"I'll go into Boise," he thought. "I've got to see to Mills and the Vandorts." In the night, he should be able to enter the city.

"Never make it through the woods," he muttered, as he mounted Saber. He must chance the road, though it would be guarded.

He lost half an hour circling the point where he had last observed the Dorgan killers. Reaching the beaten track, he let Saber run, heading for Boise.

A mile after he struck the road, a man leaped from the brush to the highway.

"Halt! Who's that?"

"It's me, Shorty!" sang out the Rio Kid. There was always a "Shorty" in such a large gang as Dorgan's.

The sentinel held his fire for the needed instant. The Rio Kid's Colt blared, and he sped on.

Further on, along the main road, a horseman he overtook sought to stop him. He cut around, his Colt snarling, and ahead now were the lights of Boise.

He knew that Dorgan men would be watching the streets in the center of town, so he kept to the back ways until he reached Vandort's house. Then he leaped from the hard-breathing dun, leaving him in the blackness of the carriage shed.

A light burned in the front of the house. The Rio Kid found the back door open and stepped in, ready for trouble, but the place was quiet.

Professor Adolf Rohr, the elderly language teacher, and his wife, white-haired "Aunt Lucy," as Ursula called her, were sitting in the parlor with young Mrs. Cass whose eyes showed that she had been weeping. Mrs. Hobson, too, was in the house, but had gone to bed.

"Mr. Pryor!" cried Aunt Lucy, getting up to greet him.

It took them a moment to realize it was the Rio Kid, gaunt as he was, with his face smeared, and covered with the stubble of a beard.

"Howdy, folks," he said hurriedly. "I haven't much time. Where's Doctor Vandort? What's happened?"

Mrs. Cass burst into sobs. Rohr, his seamed face grave, answered the Rio Kid.

"Last night," he said. "Lucy and I retired early. I think it was about ten o'clock when we were awakened by strange noises. Lucy looked out the window."

"I saw a black carriage," she said. "There were many armed men, and they took Professor Vandort, Cass, and Hobson, who had been working in the study. Ursula, too, is gone!"

A note which had been left threatened death to Vandort and the other captives if any trouble was made. But Rohr had reported the matter to the authorities. So far, though, no news had come as they anxiously waited.

"And Lew Mills?" asked the Rio Kid grimly.

"We haven't seen him since Monday afternoon."

The worst of the Rio Kid's fears were realized. Dorgan, the winner, had seized his friends!

CHAPTER XIV

Defiance

HASTENING as fast as he could, it still took the Rio Kid twenty minutes to get over to the City Hall, in order to dodge Dorgan gunmen who were all over Boise. In the lighted front office, the Rio Kid saw Marshal Tim Hanks, a lean, brown-mustached officer who had helped handle Bannack Jake. Hanks' long legs were on the table, his hands were folded across his belt, and he was dozing.

The Rio Kid went in through the window, quickly shook Hanks awake.

"Ugh—what the—who—" The marshal's chin dropped as he recognized his visitor.

"Hanks," the Rio Kid said hurriedly, "we've got to muster help—forty, fifty, if possible, to hit Dorgan. He's taken over the town, snatched up Vandort and his daughter, and others. He's got to be arrested, forced to tell where he's taken 'em—"

"Take it easy," broke in Hanks.

His manner was strained. He cast a quick, furtive glance at the gun-belt and Colt on the table a yard from his brown hand.

"Move!" snapped the Rio Kid. "This is life and death."

"Shucks!" growled the marshal. "I can't hoof out and snaffle Yates Dorgan, not without special orders. He's a friend of the Governor's, got lots of influence in this city, feller."

"Dorgan sicked his gang on Reynolds, Sieber, and on me and my pard, Mireles!" the Rio Kid said hotly. "Drove us off, wounded Reynolds and Celestino! Now he's holdin' the Vandorts, I tell yuh, and he's a killer!"

He wasn't getting anywhere, it seemed. Hanks was impervious to his alarm. There

was a difference in the marshal's attitude toward the Rio Kid also. He had been a hero in Boise, but now—

"Where's all yore witnesses?" demanded Hanks. "Where's Reynolds and Mills and so on?"

"They can't come to Boise, for Dorgan's got men gunnin' for us all. Mills may be dead, for all I know. Have you still got Bannack Jake?"

"Yeah, he's back there. But I hear they'll let him out on bail in the mornin'. That Arnold Burke feller was around with a writ of haby-corpuscle."

The Rio Kid thought he heard a sound from the open window. A Dorgan man might be sneaking up to shoot him in the back.

He jumped toward the window. But the noise had ceased. And as he looked back at Marshal Hanks, he saw that the officer had snatched up his Colt, had it cocked and aimed at the Rio Kid's middle.

"Now calm down and reach!" growled Hanks. "Yuh can spend the night in a cell and tell yore story to the judge in the mornin'."

It meant death, to move. Hanks could not miss at six feet, and it was too far for the Rio Kid to try to lunge for the revolver cylinder to prevent the weapon from exploding. The officer must have seen the desperate glint in Pryor's eyes, for he backed off a bit. But did not relax his vigilance.

"Keep yore paws up!" he ordered.

"What yuh takin' me for?" the Rio Kid demanded, burning with inward fury.

"I got a warrant for yore arrest, Rio Kid," said Hanks. "Dorgan and two others swore to it. They say yuh killed Duke Anson, because he won a wad of money from yore pard, Lew Mills. Yuh was seen comin' out of Anson's hotel room just before he was found with his throat slit. And the night clerk told us yuh'd been there, askin' for Anson!"

* * * * *

Lew Mills' whole big body quivered with his rage against Dorgan. He had never known he could hate anyone as he did the saloon owner who, with his killers, had seized the reins in Boise.

It was Tuesday night. Twenty-four hours before, the Vandorts had been taken from their home at the point of a gun, and driven out of town. Lew, himself, had already been captured.

He sat now on a backless chair, his hands bound behind him. His lips were swollen and cut, and there were blue bruises on his face from the beating he had taken at the hands of Dorgan's men.

A candle with a glass chimney over it burned on the slab table which stood on the dirt floor in the center of the woods cabin where he was prisoner, a shack made of pine logs and chinked with red mud. Armed men surrounded the place which was on a wooded heights miles out of Boise. The one door was sagging on leather hinges, and small, glassless windows were at either end. The fireplace was blackened from many cookfires which had heated the big iron pot hanging over the hearth.

PALE and silent, Ursula Vandort sat beside her father who was slumped on a bench beside the wall, breathing heavily. Professor Cass, who had tried to resist, lay on a blanket, sick from the beating he had taken. Stout Professor Hobson, who had lost his spectacles and could hardly see his hand before his face without them, drooped unhappily nearby.

Professor Vandort was ill from worry and strain. Dorgan's perfidy had hurt him deeply, but now all doubts as to Dorgan's motives had been dispelled from the professor's trusting soul.

Dorgan stood before Vandort. It was the first time the saloonkeeper had returned since he had brought his prisoners here.

"How much is in the fund now, Professor?" he asked. "It's still in the First National, isn't it?"

Vandort set his jaw stubbornly. "You are an evil man," he said stubbornly. "And I will die before I help you steal more of the university's money."

"You don't seem to realize what a fix you're in, Vandort," snapped Dorgan. "It won't do you any good to lecture me."

Mills glowered. How gladly he would have wrung Dorgan's neck!

The young miner was still blaming himself for the ease with which he had walked into Dorgan's trap. When Lew had left Ursula's home late Monday evening, he had ridden downtown. A boy had stopped him, saying the Rio Kid was waiting for him at the El Dorado. Unaware of the

terrible fight in the lower part of town, when the Rio Kid and his comrades had been run out of Boise, Lew Mills entered Dorgan's saloon. A bartender had told him he would find the Rio Kid in the back rooms.

Dorgan's men had stuck a gun on him, and rushed him upstairs to Dorgan's quarters, where he had been held through the evening. Tied up in the bedroom, with an armed guard over him, he had overheard snatches of talk between Dorgan and men who reported to him. He heard Dorgan order someone to "take care of Faber." Later, men had come in and breathlessly told Dorgan that the Rio Kid, Sieber, Reynolds, and the Mexican had escaped in the darkness.

That had infuriated Dorgan. He had cursed sulphurously.

"Every man who can be spared is to hunt 'em down, shoot 'em on sight!" he had raged. "With the Rio Kid loose, I can't take chances! If they don't get him in the next hour, I'll have to pick up Vandort. Get goin'!"

Dorgan had waited, restlessly pacing, now and then glancing in to scowl at Mills.

"You'll get what's coming to you," Dorgan had promised.

Dorgan plainly feared the Rio Kid, his power and vengeance, his ability to strike back. It had needled him, thought Mills, to the desperate insurance he finally took of seizing Vandort and Ursula, and two professors.

Finally hustled down the outside staircase and into a coach drawn by four horses, Mills had sat bound and gagged, in agony of mind and body, while the Vandorts and their friends had been bundled in. Then all of them had been driven, under guard, to the mountain hideout.

"I don't like to hurt you, Vandort," Dorgan was saying now, as the professor proved stubborn, "but I mean to make sure I have enough money to live on right if I have to leave Boise in a hurry. What I have is tied up in the El Dorado and my pay-roll eats what the saloon makes. It's a mighty big pay-roll now, thanks to the Rio Kid, curse him, for I've had to take on fifty extra fighters this week, and Bannack Jake's lawyer eats money like a prairie fire does dry grass. I've fixed things up fairly well in town, but I can't swear to that till the Rio Kid's dead."

Mills felt some measure of relief. At least he could hope, while Bob Pryor lived.

Pryor's expose of Dorgan had injured Professor Vandort's reputation. And Reynolds, so powerful a voice in Boise, had disappeared. Dorgan seemed to take a malicious pleasure in taunting Vandort with that.

"You might as well throw in with me, Professor," he drawled. "Many are saying you're not the angel you were supposed to be. Rumors are all over town that you were in on the graft."

Dorgan was well aware how badly he needed Vandort's assistance in withdrawing the funds deposited for the school. He would need the signatures of both Vandort and Hobson on any check presented at the bank.

"We'll drive downtown in the morning, Vandort," he suggested. "You'll go into the bank with me and get the money. I'll give you a good split. No one will be able to prove anything!"

MILLS knew Dorgan's real caliber now. He knew that Dorgan not only was a ruthless killer, but that the man would not stop at torture to gain his ends.

"I will die first!" repeated Vandort. Sick as he was, he rose to courageous heights.

Mills saw the flush deepening in Dorgan's cheeks, the twitching of the tall man's snout, a sure sign he was near the end of his patience.

"He'll hit Vandort in a jiffy," thought Mills. He was in agony, worrying over Ursula.

"You old goat!" Dorgan exploded, and struck Vandort across the face. All pretense of friendliness had fled.

"Don't you dare!" screamed Ursula, leaping in front of Dorgan, as her father sagged, dazed by the blow.

"Hold her, boys," ordered Dorgan. "Heat up that iron pin, and he'll soon talk."

An iron was made ready. The smoking point was shoved at Vandort's eyes, but Dorgan turned it at the last moment and burned the professor's cheek. Ursula screamed again, as her father groaned.

In uncontrollable fury, Lew Mills leaped

up, lunging across the cabin. He kicked Dorgan, bowled him aside, but instantly toughs were on Mills, throwing him to the dirt floor. Dorgan poked the hot metal at Lew's face, and as it touched, spasms of agony tore through the young miner.

CHAPTER XV

Man to Man

WHILE the Rio Kid stared at Marshal Hanks unbelievingly, in the jail office in Boise, the grim officer kept his Colt steadily aimed at Bob Pryor's middle.

The jail was unusually quiet. There was a turnkey on duty back in the cell-block, an old fellow who had served as marshal in the early days. But no deputies were present, when ordinarily there would have been half a dozen around at such an hour.

"See that iron gate?" Hanks asked coldly. "Lift the bolt and step through. And don't forget I'm right behind yuh."

"Yuh're makin' a mighty bad mistake, Hanks," the Rio Kid said through tight lips.

And at that moment a quiet voice spoke from the open window behind the marshal.

"Freeze where yuh be, Hanks!"

Wild hope flooded the Rio Kid's heart. That was the voice of Al Sieber, his comrade! Hanks glanced back over his hunched, bony shoulder, saw Sieber's Colt resting on the window ledge.

The Rio Kid whirled, his quick hand closing on the cylinder of the marshal's revolver. He wrested the weapon away, broke it, extracted the shells, and tossed the pistol on the table.

"See yuh later, Hanks," he snapped. "If yuh're smart yuh'll lie low, savvy? Dorgan's goose is goin' to be cooked."

Hanks said not a word as the Rio Kid left by the window, and hurried off with Sieber to exchange experiences. Quickly, Pryor brought Sieber up to date.

Sieber whistled. "Whew! Dorgan's shore ridin' high! Lucky I saw yuh go into the jail. If Dorgan found out yuh was in a cell, he'd have yuh lynched in jig time. Reynolds and Mireles are better, a lot stronger. Near dark, we moseyed back toward Boise, and they're hid in a shack down by the river. I sneaked in to hunt you. Seen yuh slip out of Vandort's but there were some Dorgan men near, so I trailed yuh. When I peeked in the winder, I saw the marshal with his gun on yuh, and heard some of yore talk."

"We got to find help, Al. I've got a hunch I savvy where Dorgan's taken Vandort and Mills."

The Rio Kid told about the wagon tracks he had crossed when on his way to Faber's, of seeing Dorgan in the sort of vehicle which had carried the Vandorts away.

"Where yuh expect to pick up enough men to hit and win, like we'd have to?" asked Sieber. "Dorgan won't waste any time. He's after that money Vandort's got charge of."

"And he'll have it or kill Vandort," the Rio Kid agreed. "Mebbe he's already done in Lew Mills. . . Reckon we could rouse the folks here in Boise? Seems to be a big meetin' over at Slocum Hall."

Slocum Hall was a big public building where entertainments and benefits were given. It was lighted up, and there were people around the place, some of them city marshals on duty. That explained why Hanks had been alone in the jail.

"I'll bet yuh it's Sherman!" Sieber suddenly exclaimed.

"General Sherman?" echoed the Rio Kid.

"I'd swear I seen him ride by while I was hid on Front Street, when I first hit town. I'd know that red beard anywheres."

The Rio Kid gripped Sieber's arm in excitement.

"Al, Sherman'll give us the aid we need, even if the city marshals won't! I scouted for him, and he's the Big Boss of the Army now!"

He recalled now that he had read an item in Reynolds' paper, saying that General William T. Sherman, Commander-in-Chief of the Army, was expected in Boise soon.

It was late, and the meeting was nearly over. Sherman had made a speech, and had drawn a full house of Boise citizens who had come to hear the famous soldier.

The main doors stood open. Up the side way was a smaller entry, near the platform, for speakers and officials.

Sieber covered the Rio Kid as he approached, by the rear street. Dorgan men were watching the meeting from the sidewalk. Through the open window the Rio Kid saw Sherman shaking hands with people, talking in his animated, facile manner. The lean, red-haired, red-bearded Sherman had extraordinary ability as a talker.

Scarcely able to contain his impatience, the Rio Kid crouched by a woodbox at the rear of the hall until the audience started home. Sherman was accompanied by several officers, his staff. The Rio Kid had served with some of them in the War. Among the distinguished company he recognized Major-General John M. Schofield, Sherman's Chief-of-Staff, a hearty man with a strong face adorned by a close-clipped mustache. Schofield was noted for his genius as a field chief.

SHERMAN finally emerged from the door, trailed by his staff, the Governor of Idaho, the Mayor of Boise, and others. The Rio Kid quickly stepped out and saluted, and Sherman paused, flicking at his cigar end with his little finger, a distinctive mannerism of his.

"Good evenin', General Sherman!" said the Rio Kid. "Cap'n Bob Pryor, sir."

Sherman's quick eyes brightened. "So it is, so it is!" He thrust out his hand, heartily shaking with Pryor. "Always glad to meet an old comrade. . . . You remember Cap'n Pryor, don't you, Schofield? Best scout in the Army. Custer said so, and that settles it, eh?"

Schofield greeted the Rio Kid heartily.

As the Rio Kid stopped Sherman, a knot of Dorgan killers had sighted their quarry. Sieber yelled a warning, and a bullet whirled close past Sherman and lodged in the wooden wall a foot from Bob Pryor. Sieber fired instantly, and the Dorgan men paused.

Sherman, Schofield, and the officers of the General's staff, drew their pistols, facing the threat. The Dorgan men hastily retired.

"What's all this!" growled Sherman.

The Rio Kid quickly told him the situation.

"H'm, sounds bad," said Sherman, deep lines between his eyes.

He puffed thoughtfully at his cigar until the end glowed redhot, then called a major to whom he gave concise orders. The major saluted, and hurried off. . . .

At the first touch of gray dawn, Sieber and the Rio Kid flitted along the wagon trail, wraiths in the forest. They had told Sherman how to reach the trace, then had ridden full-speed in the night to the woods road where the Rio Kid had seen the wheel marks of Dorgan's vehicle. They had captured three Dorgan aides who had been despatched from Boise to warn Dorgan that the Rio Kid had contacted Sherman.

The Rio Kid and Sieber were in their element. Both had such a genius for scouting that they could out-think and out-do the savage Indian in cunning. And now they knew that not far behind them was a detachment of cavalry from the Boise barracks, coming at Sherman's order. Sherman, Schofield, and the General's staff officers were with the cavalry, having come along for the lark.

"Wait!" whispered the Rio Kid.

He paused, picking up something from under a bush. It was a woman's white handkerchief with the initials embroidered "U.V." in one corner.

"They came this way," he said, and realized that Ursula Vandort must have managed to drop the handkerchief from the carriage, hoping against hope it might help.

The light was well up when the Rio Kid and Sieber peered in at the silent shack, hidden in the woods. The wagon tracks had come to within a half mile of the hideout, then horses had been used.

There were armed sentries out, but no warning had got through to Dorgan, thanks to the Rio Kid's precautions. The door of the cabin was closed.

"Slide back and tell Sherman to come ahead, Al," said the Rio Kid. "He can send columns around on both sides. I'll wait here."

The minutes seemed to drag interminably. The Rio Kid feared those he hoped to rescue might be dead or badly hurt, and if Dorgan realized he was trapped he might kill in his fury.

A faint crackle, the snap of a dry twig, caused the Rio Kid, flat on his stomach in the brush, to glance behind him. He

glimpsed a blue-clad cavalry trooper, carbine in hand, moving through the woods.

The Dorgan guards grew suddenly alert. One pointed to the woods on the opposite side. He gave a shout of alarm and fired his six-shooter, the bullet making a whipping noise in the cool morning air.

A bugle's notes—the charge—sounded! Hoarse yells came as Sherman led his men to the attack.

The door of the shack flew open, and as the Rio Kid jumped to his feet, he saw Yates Dorgan rush out. He could see the expression of horrified consternation on Dorgan's face.

Dorgan roared commands. Shots were being exchanged, and a Dorgan killer sagged at his boss' feet.

Dorgan had his gun cocked, ready to fire, but he was hunting escape. He ran around the cabin, to reach the woods. The Rio Kid sent a slug which came so close to Dorgan that the man swung, snarling, to face his enemy.

"Throw down, Dorgan!" shouted the running Rio Kid.

DORGAN had been headed toward the thick brush and a rock bluff up which he hoped to make his dash for freedom. The Rio Kid had cut him off. For a flash, they faced one another, then Dorgan fired.

The Rio Kid heard the venomous whine of the bullet, past his ear. He took the fraction of time necessary for real aim, and raised his thumb from the Colt hammer.

Dorgan shuddered. His arm dropped, and he fell against the cabin's log wall, slumping in death.

Cavalry troopers were closing in. Firing broke off as Dorgan's gunmen realized they were trapped. They dared not fight the organized troops. Dropping their weapons, they raised their hands.

The Rio Kid rushed through the cabin door. Vandort lay on a blanket against the wall. Ursula, her eyes wide, was beside him. Lew Mills was bruised and battered, trussed hand and foot, but still living. So were the others Dorgan had taken prisoners.

"Made it in time!" thought the Rio Kid, as he began to cut their bonds. . . .

When Sieber, Mireles and the Rio Kid rode out of Boise, on their way back to Arizona, all Dorgan's men had been arrested or had fled. Lew Mills and Ursula were to be married, and Vandort's college would soon be open for the students flocking to it.

Jim Reynolds had a great story, was running it in his newspaper. The Rio Kid's name had been cleared of Dorgan's lying charge, but Bannack Jake must pay for his crimes.

The Rio Kid looked over his shoulder for a final glimpse of the beautiful little capital nestling among the mountains.

"Well?" asked Sieber. "Did yuh learn anything from all them perfessors?"

"I reckon I did, Al. Here, I owe yuh that bet."

Sieber pocketed the money.

"Mills is better for her, Rio Kid," he said. "He's already wearin' a necktie on weekdays. Women tame a man. It's good for some, but you and me are diff'rent."

There was loneliness in the Rio Kid's heart, but ahead stretched the danger trails of the great Frontier. And they called the Rio Kid, who rode for justice.

FURTHER EXCITING EXPLOITS OF BOB PRYOR IN

GUNS OF HAPPY VALLEY

By LEE E. WELLS

NEXT ISSUE'S FEATURED COMPLETE FULL-LENGTH NOVEL

Raising his point of attack, Temple drove an uppercut to Brace's chin that snapped his head back

THE WANDERER

By ALLAN K. ECHOLS

Jim Temple discovers that a man can run just so far—if he is a man—and then must stop, face about, and fight!

JIM TEMPLE had lived in fear of this day and hour. He knew that it had to come, he had dreaded it. He had looked down the back road for seven years, hoping to see it coming, to be forewarned so that he could run from it.

And then it had come—while his back was turned, while he was bent over the hind hoof of his horse, replacing a cast shoe in Jed Brown's blacksmith shop.

He heard the two men come in, and when he finished clinching the last nail he dropped the hoof to the ground and turned around, and there stood the proof that a man could no more keep his past from following him than he could amputate his own shadow.

There were two of them; Miles Traynor, the proprietor of the Bearpaw Saloon, and

Buck Brace, the man from Plainos County. It was the sight of the latter which made Jim Temple's lips go dry and caused his hands to clench and his whole body to feel cold in the April sun.

Miles Traynor leaned back against the work bench and started peeling the blue paper off a package of Old Virginia Cheroots, but the newcomer to Woodbine came on toward Jim and stopped only when he was within handshaking distance of him. This Buck Brace was a tall man, as tall as Jim, but had more depth in his chest, and there was a general air of uncleanliness about him, from the scuffed boots to the unshaved, blackish face.

Brace held out his hand. "Howdy, Dogget," he said with a twisted smile. "Glad to run into yuh."

"My name's Temple. Jim Temple."

Jim Temple felt the full debasement of denying his name to any man, and it was worse when he saw Brace's twisted, knowing grin. To deny his name to a man like this filled him with a sense of outright cowardice.

"Yeah," the man answered. "I heard yuh was callin' yoreself Temple around here. Hear yuh're city marshal, an' got a nice ranch and everythin'. But I don't see yuh wearin' no star, nor packin' no gun. How-come?"

"They're hangin' on the wall over there. I'll get the gun and leave the star there, if that's what's on yore mind."

Brace's grin was a swagger.

"No. I changed my mind about gunnin' yuh down for killin' my brother," he said. "Yuh wouldn't do me no good dead. I'm glad now they didn't hang yuh."

"That's my business, and if yuh didn't come to settle that business of yore brother, then yuh'd better ride on out of town. I won't be doin' yuh any good at all."

"I came all the way up here just to see yuh. Why, Dogget, yuh ain't a bit sociable. I couldn't think o' rushin' off the minute I came. No, sir, you and me is goin' to get right chummy before my visit is over."

THE two men stood facing each other, the challenger and the challenged, and there was a short silence while they sized each other up. There was an insolent swagger in the overbearing manner of one; there was a cold, numb rage within the other.

"Just what do yuh mean by that?" Jim Temple asked.

"Just this. With this new gold strike out in the hills back of here there's gonna be money in this town, and I'm gonna get my share of it. I'm cuttin' in on the gamblin'."

"There's not goin' to be any of yore kind of gamblin'," Temple answered.

"I think there will be," Brace answered, "and under yore protection, too."

Then Temple hit him.

The suddenness of the blow caught Brace unawares. It landed square on his chin and knocked him back against the anvil, where he slid to the dirt floor. His hand came to rest on the blacksmith hammer Jim Temple had dropped. He picked it up and threw it from a sitting position.

The missile caught Jim Temple a glancing blow on the head, staggering him just long enough for Brace to get to his feet and rush forward with a pair of heavy hoof nippers he had grabbed off the anvil rack.

Brace's eyes were narrowed, mean, and killer-ugly. He drew the weapon back and slashed with it. Temple stepped inside the blow and it hit him on the shoulder, shooting pains down his whole left side.

But it was like a reviving dash of cold water—this coming to actual physical grips with the shadow he had been trying to escape so long, turning and facing it at last, fighting it out. And the effect of it was to erase some of his black despair.

His two fists pounded the hard middle of the man called Brace, and the contact of his fists with enemy flesh gave him for the time a type of courage that had long been gone.

Brace tried to back away so that he could make his weapon more effective, but Jim Temple stayed with him, following him up, keeping too close for the man to use the heavy iron in his hand.

His fists beat regularly against Brace's middle, and gradually the effects began to show. Brace still couldn't get in a good blow, and he was too busy trying to get away to trade fists with Temple.

Temple raised the point of his attack, backed up a little and shot an uppercut toward Brace's chin. It knocked Brace's head back for a moment, and when Brace recovered he lifted his knee and caught Temple in the groin, sending him reeling backward with the pain of it.

Brace threw the nippers at Temple's head, and they cut a swath along his scalp. Then Brace had his first opportunity to grab

for his gun, and his hand went down and came up with it.

Temple had expected that move, and he tried to prevent it. But he was dazed, and his movements seemed slow to him. Still, he found himself grappling with the man, clinging to the wrist of his gun hand, trying to wrest the weapon from him.

But Brace had got a moment's respite, and his strength and confidence were mounting. His breath came evenly and his muscles were hard against Temple—and he had the gun.

Temple lunged against him and they went down together against the dark earthern floor, and down in the cinders they fought for the gun, for life. And in the grip of the two men wrestling for its possession, the gun went off.

It did not make much noise, because the barrel of the weapon was against Brace's chin. The bullet plowed up through his jaws and came out the top of his head. Brace relaxed on the floor of the shop, dead, with his gun still in his own hand.

Jim Temple got to his feet and staggered over and leaned against the anvil. He wiped the sweat and blood out of his eyes and looked around the shop. Jed Brown, the owner who had been out to eat dinner, was back, and there was a crowd gathered around the door of the shop. They were all silent, for they had seen the long hard fight to the death, and the raw tension of it had left them exhausted.

"Somebody get Doctor Bentley," Temple said.

"Windy's already gone after him," the blacksmith answered. "Yuh hurt, Jim?"

"No," Temple answered, feeling his scalp. "Not bad."

As he washed up at the bench, he thought he ought to feel better, having finally come to blows with this man who had ridden out of his past. At least he had closed one dangerous mouth forever. But Miles Traynor had heard the talk—and Miles Traynor was an enemy. He was not in the crowd gathered around the open door of the blacksmith shop.

OLD Doc Bentley had arrived and was squatting now beside the dead man. Bentley was tall and stooped, and he had a full head of silver hair. He wasn't so agile any more, but it took no more than a glance for him to see that the only thing he could do for Brace was to fill out the legal forms and order his burial. Bentley was mayor and coroner, as well as the only doctor in Woodbine.

He got to his feet and turned to Jim.

"What happened, son?" he asked. Bentley had called him "son" these five years now, but Jim reflected that he might not be doing it much longer.

"Do yuh mind if I wait till we get to yore office to make my report?" he asked.

He intended when he asked the question to tell Doctor Bentley the whole truth of the matter. But by the time the formalities were over and they had Brace's body removed to the little funeral room in the back of Harvey's Mercantile Store, Jim found his resolve had weakened. By the time he got to Bentley's office in the front room of his home, the old fear had him in its grip again, and he made his report as brief and official as possible.

"This man came in and propositioned me about opening up gamblin' here, to get some of the new money that's comin' in," he explained, when he was seated opposite the old man's desk. "I told him nothin' doin', and he threatened me. I had my gun hung up on a peg, so I hit him with my fist. We fought and his gun went off in the fight. That's the story."

"Ever see the man before?" Doctor Bentley asked casually. "He looks like a bad actor."

Jim Temple felt his mouth grow dry. As he got up from his chair, his skin prickled and there was a weakness in his knees. He went to the window and looked out, gazing down the road by which he had entered this little settlement five years ago, after two years of dodging the law. It was then that Doctor Bentley had given him a job, running his ranch, the one he was now buying from Doc. Doc had been, and still was, the best friend he had ever known, almost the only one, for that matter.

"I wish yuh wouldn't ask me that question, Doc."

Bentley didn't look at him, but kept his eyes down on his desk.

"Well, son," he answered, after a long moment, "your personal business is your own. The report satisfies me."

"Thanks, Doc."

He went out of Bentley's office on heavy feet, and walked down the street of the town which had become home to him—the only home he had ever known.

He wanted to feel that the killing of Brace had again severed the shadow of his past, but he knew that it hadn't, that the trouble had only started.

As he passed along the boardwalk there were little knots of people standing around, ranchers who had come in to do their Saturday shopping and gossiping, and miners, most of them strangers to Jim. The ranchers nodded or spoke, and he imagined there was a new coolness in their greetings. The miners just looked at him and stopped talking until he passed.

There was no question that there was a new tension in the town on this Saturday afternoon, and that it involved him. He felt the strength of its undercurrents.

He was not surprised when he saw Miles Traynor standing on the board walk in front of his Bearpaw Saloon. Traynor walked toward him, as though he had been waiting for him to come along. Then as Jim approached, Traynor stopped dead still in the middle of the walk, and waited. Dressed in a black broadcloth suit and white silk shirt, he stood in his shiny boots, his arms crossed. Under his coat were a high-worn pair of pistols, which he was never without. There was a cold smile on his face as he greeted Jim.

"Just a minute, Dogget," he said silkily. "I'd like a word with yuh."

"Temple, the name is," Jim answered. His voice had a firmness which he did not feel.

"We'll argue that point out some other time," Traynor said. "What I wanted to tell yuh was that I have not repeated the conversation I happened to overhear in the blacksmith shop—and there is no need for me to—if yuh've got any sense."

"Did yuh say yuh *happened* to overhear it?"

"Well, we can put it that way. But, of course, I knew in advance what was goin' to be said. I just wanted Brace to meet yuh face to face, so I'd be sure I knew who yuh were. I don't like to do a man an injustice, y' understand."

"Yes, I understand that," Jim said coldly. "I had an idea you were back of this, somehow. What's on yore mind?"

TRAYNOR unfolded his arms and flipped back his coat to hook a thumb over his gun belt.

"Let's see if I've got my facts straight. Down in Plainos County about seven years ago you were a paid gun hand for a rancher named Gregory. One night in a saloon, yuh shot Brace's brother, Avery, when he was unarmed, and were arrested and sentenced to hang for it. Yuh escaped and changed yore name—and here yuh are, while they're still lookin' for yuh down there with a rope. Is that right?"

"That's Brace's story, I reckon," Temple said. "So where do you come in?"

"I don't like to see a young man with a good start like you've got lose it and end up on the wrong end of a lariat. Brace won't talk now, of course, and I won't either. Provided—"

"Get on with it, Trayonor. What's yore proposition?"

"All this new money; I'm a business man and I want my share of it. I can get it if you'll be reasonable about gamblin' in my place. And a city marshal don't make a fortune in wages. I could see that yuh didn't lose nothin' by it."

Jim Temple's fist landed just once on Miles Traynor's chin with all the explosive force of his pent-up rage. The blow cracked like a whip-lash.

The saloonkeeper reeled over backward and his black broadcloth suit met and mingled with the dust of the street. He raised up on one elbow, started to reach for his gun, then changed his mind and got up and dusted himself off. He stood close to Jim Temple, speaking low.

"I ought to kill yuh for that, Temple, and I will if I ever catch yuh without that tin star on yore vest. But since yuh're wearin' it, yuh can either cooperate with me, or I'll kill yuh for the escaped murderer that yuh are. I'm opening my faro tables tonight, and they're runnin' from now on. I don't think yuh'll want to stop me, because if yuh try it, yuh're a dead man."

Miles Traynor thumped the dust off his flat crowned back hat, put it carefully on his head, and walked into his saloon, leaving Jim Temple standing spraddle legged on the sidewalk, his hands on his hips, a cold numbness in his heart.

Finally he looked around at those who had gathered around.

"All right, that's all, folks," he said.

He walked down to the blacksmith shop to get his horse. Old Jed Brown straightened up, letting a horse's hoof drop, and taking off his glasses to wipe the sweat out of his eyes. He took a big chew of Natural Leaf

before he spoke.

"Y'know, Jim, I been tellin' 'em there ain't anythin' to it, what they're sayin' around. There ain't, is there?"

"What do yuh mean, Jed?"

" 'Bout professional gamblin' openin' up."

"Why, no," Jim answered. "As far as I'm concerned gamblin' is not goin' to open up."

"That's mighty fine, Jim," the old man said, relieved. "I like a friendly hand of poker just like you or anybody else does, but us regular people just couldn't picture you lettin' Miles Traynor import a bunch of card sharps to rob the ranchers and miners around here. Yeah, they'll be mighty proud to hear yuh ain't backin' down on that. How's yore stock?"

"Grass is good. I'm just ridin' out to look 'em over now," Jim said, eager to escape. He couldn't face the old man with what was inside him just now. He went out to the cottonwood tree beside the shop and started untying his bridle reins.

Mother Bentley and Mrs. Harvey found him there. Doc Bentley's wife was a white-haired old lady who mothered all the doctor's patients and the doctor as well, not to mention every sick person in Woodbine County.

"I just set out looking for you, Jim Temple," she said. "You're going to object, but you won't get anywhere with it. We're having a box supper at the church Tuesday night to get money to finish paying for the organ, and you're going to be the auctioneer. And wear your gun, so you can make them bid high. You'll be there?"

Jim Temple felt such a torment within him that he gripped his saddle horn and cantle and bowed his head against the seat of his saddle. Standing thus it came to him with an overpowering clarity that his roots had grown so deeply in the soil of Woodbine that he was no longer a man of his own—he was part of a community, and he had as much obligation to the community as he had to himself.

Tuesday! Painfully he wondered if any of the decent people in this town would even speak to him on Tuesday, or ever again.

"I'll try to make it," he promised, then mounted his horse and rode swiftly out of town.

JIM TEMPLE'S ranch was not very big, but it was a good one. Situated in a green valley that was fenced all around, it had plenty of water. He rode mechanically over it in the afternoon, examining his small herd of Black Angus cattle and their new calves, checking fences. He rode down to the pond where he had planted willows, and a flock of geese left the water with loud splashes and honkings and sailed gracefully toward the northward in their Spring flight. It was beautiful, restful—and it was his.

The distant hills were greening, and there was something peaceful about their low rolling sides, not high and overpowering like big mountains, but soft and soothing.

Jim Temple had found this quiet valley after two years of wandering, and he had halted in his fearful running from the hangman's noose, living in hope that he had amputated the shadow of his past.

When Jim came here Doctor Bentley had given him a job on this ranch which was then a rundown place, and he had made a thing of beauty out of it. Doctor Bentley had later got him a job helping out Marshal Walling, for needed extra money, and he had made good again. When Walling died Jim Temple became Marshal of Woodbine. Then Doctor Bentley had sold him the ranch on easy terms, and gradually his roots had sunk into the rich friendly ground of the valley.

As he rode about the ranch he looked at it with the feelings of a man who was leaving his home for the last time. He shouldn't have stopped here, he saw now, for the very peace of it made it the more difficult for him to run away.

And run away he must, always, for the charge that Miles Traynor had thrown in his teeth was basically true. What mattered it that he had merely been foreman of a ranch which a land hog was trying to steal in a range-war, that he had shot in self defense only after Avery Brace had drawn his gun, or that Brace's gun had been removed by Brace's friends before the sheriff arrived, and that they later swore that the dead man had not even worn a gun? They had lied at his trial, and a partial judge had sentenced Jim Dogget to hang. His appeal had been denied, and to save his life, he had overpowered the sheriff and shot his way out of jail.

But he had not destroyed that unjust death sentence which hung over his head; and it would hang there until it was satisfied. So, Jim Dogget had disappeared, and a Jim Temple had taken his place, to wander, to hide from every man who might recognize him; but always to run from the shadow of the noose.

And now, when he had found a refuge, when he had found a home which meant something to him, and where he meant something to others, now he must run again. For men were queer creatures, and there would be those among his friends who would not believe the untold side of the story, men who would turn their heads from anyone whom the law called a murderer.

These things were bitter dust in his mouth as he rode up to his ranchhouse and fed and watered his horse for what was to be the last time before he rode again down the lonely trail. He had no hope whatever that Miles Traynor would fail to act as he had threatened if he could not buy Jim Temple. And Temple could not sell out the people of Woodbine, even though they would turn from him on the morrow when the story must come out.

It was dusk when he went into the house to change his clothes. But he did not light the lamp immediately, for he could not yet bring himself to look for the last time on the snug rooms of the place which had been the only home he had ever known. He pulled a chair up to the window and sat down.

The window framed a picture of a full red moon breaking over the soft hill. Fleecy clouds, so tenuous that the moon's light shone silver through them, drifted lightly northward before a warm spring breeze. The clean odor of fresh grass scented the air, and a nightbird sang in the sycamore tree back of the house.

Jim Temple sat in the dark and smoked and drank in the sounds and the smells of the ranch, and they were sweet and bitter to his senses. He groped for a way to save this thing for himself, and could find none.

Suppose he sent word some way, down to Plainos County, fishing for some way to settle his case. Suppose there was an honest administration down there now. Would they drop the charge and sentence against him? That was hoping for too much.

He could not see how he could make a move without destroying everything he had built up here. A legal sentence is a legal thing, no matter how unfair the judge who issued it.

And where could he find witnesses to prove his side of the case? There simply were none, there had never been any. It was hopeless. There was nothing to do but to run again, and to keep on running.

For Miles Traynor had the means of destroying him, either by buying him off—or sending him to the gallows. And Miles Traynor was not the man to fail to use what he had.

HE HEARD a distant honking in the sky, and his eyes searched among the shining clouds. Idly they focused on a flight of Canada geese coming in low, attracted by the moon-lighted water of his pond. He watched them, as they sought a place of safety for the night.

"Come on and light," he said, hardly knowing he spoke. "There are no hunters here to bother yuh. Come on and rest."

The geese circled again, cautiously, and for the second time the black line of them came down, honking louder, looming larger against the face of the moon and the silver clouds. They were very low now, so that he could almost hear the whish of their wings as they circled for the last time. This place they desired as a refuge for the night.

And then some danger stirred the suspicion of the wise old gander which led them, and they did not land, but swiftly climbed again, and went on, mounting upward toward the moon, then circling and disappearing into the darkness.

Their voices died away in the distance.

"Figured it wasn't safe here, did yuh? Well, yuh've got more sense than I had. I shouldn't have stopped, either."

The geese stayed in his mind and he could not get rid of the thought of them, for they were like he had been, hunted, driven on from refuge to refuge, gaining only a short respite in some hidden place, and then only after a careful examination for some hidden danger. No home, no spot they could stop and defend and make their own against the trespass of those who would destroy them. They did not fight back—they only ran.

"And that's why they call a man a goose. I guess that's what I've been all along," he said into the darkness.

And then he got up and lit his lamp and wrote a letter that it took him an hour to finish.

He stripped to the waist and washed, and stood in front of his mirror and shaved his face and combed his hair carefully. He put on a fresh pair of gabardine riding pants and his new Justin boots, a tan corded shirt and his calfskin vest, and then his new Stetson. The reflection in the mirror was that of a man who had nothing to be ashamed of in

his appearance, nor the set of his jaw.

He took his gun from its scabbard and cleaned and oiled it, and replaced the shells with fresh ones. He twirled the cylinder and it spun free and smooth in its frame. He buckled on his gunbelt, thrust the gun into its holster and went out and rode into town and to Doctor Bentley's house.

Doc Bentley was in his office, behind his old flat topped desk. He seemed more stooped than ever, as though he had suddenly aged ten years, and the lines in his face were etched deeper.

"I'm glad you came," he said to Temple. "I was wonderin' where you were. Traynor has kind of taken the bit in his teeth, and has got a couple of professional gamblers operatin', I hear."

"I just got in," Jim said. "I wanted to see yuh."

He laid his letter in a sealed envelope on the old man's desk, and laid his Marshal's badge on top of it.

"I've got to turn in my badge," he said. "I'm quittin'."

Bentley's old eyes gazed at him, and there was pain in them, and lack of understanding. Jim could not speak. And after a while he looked away.

"Doc, yuh've been the best friend I ever had," Jim Temple said softly. "I know yuh're due an explanation. It's in that letter. And I'd like to ask yuh one more last favor. Will yuh not open it till mornin'?"

The old man sat stooped in his swivel chair and tapped his desk with the edge of the bulky envelope. He was not looking at Temple, but at the floor.

There was an awkward silence, and when he spoke he did so without raising his eyes.

"All right. I guess every man knows his own mind best. But I'm sorry it's like this, Temple."

It was like a blow in the face, hearing Doc call him Temple instead of son. It staggered him and it hurt him deep down inside.

He said, "Thanks, Doc," and got out of the room as quickly as he could.

Woodbine was asleep behind its darkened windows, except for the yellow lights from Miles Traynor's Saloon. Asleep in the belief that Jim Temple was guarding their safety, he thought cynically. He walked slowly along the street, absorbing its soft, dark peace, hungrily, and yet with no bitterness toward it for what it would think of him tomorrow.

IT WAS not the fault of the town which had given him refuge that he must now tear out his own roots; it had been his fault for running from a thing which he had felt to be bigger than he.

He pushed open the batwing doors of the Bearpaw Saloon and stood just inside, adjusting his eyes to the light. He looked around, saw the two new gambling tables with faro dealers in white silk shirts and breast-holstered guns, taking money from miners who eagerly fed it out to them. Paid crooks and gunslicks, no part of his own personal problem.

He saw a few ranchers and cowhands scattered along the bar, talking, not falling in with the new wild spirit which Miles Traynor was trying to inject into the place. These men saw Jim Temple standing inside the door and some of them halted their talk. They looked at him and quickly turned away. The decent element of Woodbine; these men meant everything to his personal problem.

Miles Traynor was at the far end, out in front of the bar, having a drink with two strangers to Temple. Traynor looked up, then slowly set his glass back on the bar, his drink untouched.

Temple walked through the crowd, not seeing it, looking only at Miles Traynor. Traynor said a word under his breath to the men with him, and stepped forward. Temple stopped not ten paces from him.

Traynor's white face bore a crooked smile around the tight mouth.

"Well, how do yuh like it, Marshal?"

"I don't like it, Traynor. And I'm not the Marshal of Woodbine. I've turned in my badge. Does that mean anything to yuh?"

Traynor shrugged his slight shoulders. "Why, no. Except that yuh're not as smart as I thought yuh were. "

The two men with Traynor separated, getting a few steps to either side of him, fanning out. The crowd in the room sensed the tension, and there was a general movement in it while men got out from behind Traynor and Temple.

"Yuh don't have a very good memory," Temple said evenly. "This afternoon I knocked yuh down into the dirt. Yuh promised to kill me if yuh ever saw me without my star on. Well, the star is gone, Traynor. What are yuh waitin' for?"

Traynor's eyes quickly circled the faces that looked back at him expectantly. He

looked at the floor a moment, deep in thought.

"Yuh're drunk, Temple," he muttered, then. "Forget what I said. Come back in the mornin' and we'll talk it over."

"Will yuh go for yore guns, or do I have to rub yore head in the sawdust of yore own floor?" Temple's voice was low, deadly.

A ripple of vocal sounds ran through the crowd, and then guns were flashing. And the blasting of weapons built into a roar as the pair of men siding Traynor got into action.

It was Traynor that Temple wanted, and he snapped two careful shots at the pair siding the saloonman, to clear them away before he gave his attention to Traynor. His bullet hit the first one, chest center, and he fell back over a card table.

The second man shot just as Temple did, and his bullet bit into Temple and knocked him down. But the gunman died on his feet.

Traynor had shot, too, and but for Temple's falling, the bullet would have got him. Then seeing what happened, he lowered his guns just as Temple raised himself to his elbow and brought his weapon to bear on Traynor.

Temple's gun spoke an instant before Traynor's two weapons, and one of Traynor's bullets kicked floor splinters into Jim's face. The other bullet buried itself somewhere in the flesh of his side. It plowed into him like living fire, but to Jim Temple it felt as though it had also shot away some kind of chain that had been binding him for a long time.

His gun was still aimed at Traynor, but he saw that the saloonkeeper's weapons had suddenly grown too heavy for him to hold. Traynor's arms sagged and the guns dribbled from his white hands. He caught the rail of the bar for a moment, and then his knees sagged and he lay slowly down in the clean sawdust of his floor and died.

Jim Temple tried to get to his feet, and half a dozen of the ranchers, who a moment before had turned their backs, were there to help him. Old Doc Bentley pushed his way in and took Jim away from them and led him toward his own home to patch up his wounds.

OUTSIDE, where the soft darkness enwrapped them, Doc Bentley spoke.

"You couldn't expect me to keep my promise about readin' that letter, son. But it wasn't news to me. A little while after you came to work for me, Marshal Walling found an old dodger with your picture on it. But we already knew about that rotten setup down in Plainos County, so we figgered to give you a chance to make good, and you did it to our satisfaction. Things got so bad down there that the State's Attorney General had to step in and take over the local law, so there won't be any trouble getting the name of Jim Dogget cleared any time you want me to do it for you."

"Yuh knew this all the time, and didn't tell me?" Jim asked.

"Yes," Doc answered. "I always figgered it was up to every man to work out his own salvation, otherwise he ain't fit to live at peace with himself. And by the way, here's your star. For the good of the county I've decided not to accept your resignation. We need you, because there's going to be a lot of strangers around the diggin's, driftin' in and out like a bunch of wild geese, figurin' on quick and crooked money, the same as Traynor figured."

"Don't say anythin' against geese, Doc. I've kind of got a feelin' for 'em. And do yuh think yuh can get me patched up enough to be up and around by Tuesday night?"

"Why, son?"

"Because Mother Bentley will swear that I got myself shot up just to keep from havin' to be auctioneer at the Box Supper. I wouldn't want to give her a chance to say that."

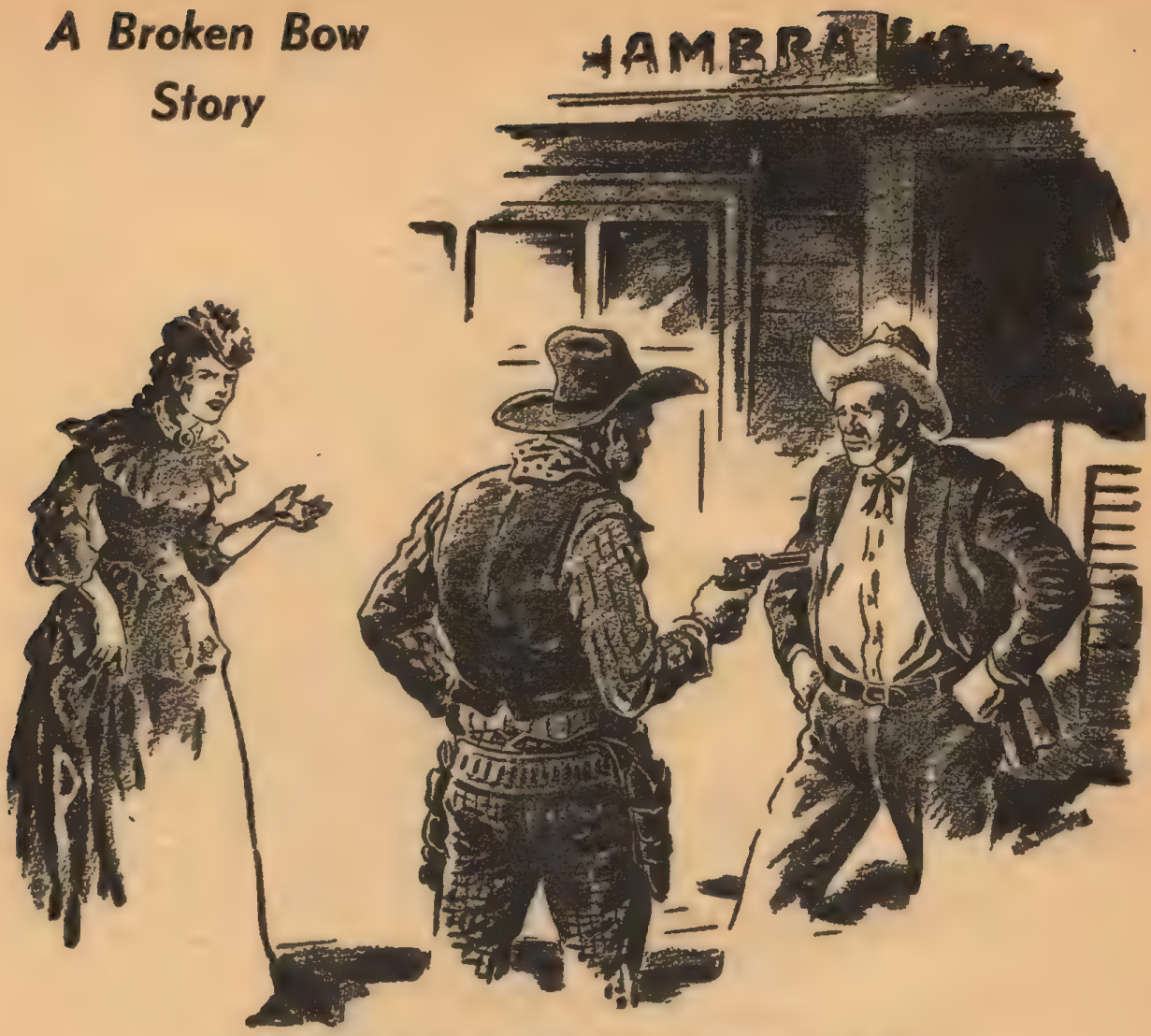
Sheriff Sam Odegarde matches wits with a crooked gambler in

BLIND MAN'S BLUFF

A Story of Broken Bow by L. ERNENWEIN

COMING NEXT ISSUE

A Broken Bow Story



"Step aside or I'll bend the barrel of this gun on your head," said Bart

THE COURTING OF KATE

By L. ERNENWEIN

Shaemus O'Shea, proprietor of the Alhambra, sides the marshal who is his rival for a colleen's affections!

THE westward thrust of railroad construction turned Broken Bow into a rough-and-tumble boomtown in one week's time.

Main Street's plank walks resounded to the tramp of muscular, maul-swinging spikemen, swaggering gandydancers and leather-lunged graders. Tents and flimsy frame structures sprouted in fantastic fashion on vacant lots. Dust-hazed freight wagons rumbled into town at all hours, and westbound stage-coaches carried capacity loads of sharp-eyed land sharks, tinhorn gamblers and painted percentage girls. As Shaemus O'Shea aptly expressed it:

"Every day is Saturday, begorrah!"

O'Shea, bald-domed proprietor of the Alhambra Saloon, stood now on the Oriental Cafe stoop after partaking of a boun-

teous breakfast. He had the drowsy look of a man not quite asleep and not quite awake, which was approximately how he felt, for Shaemus had never acquired the habit of early rising. Even as a boy he had questioned the wisdom of the early bird proposition and had informed his father that he wasn't interested in catching worms.

In the ten years that O'Shea had been in Broken Bow he had never shown his pink-cheeked cherubic face on Main Street before ten o'clock in the morning. That was why "Close-Shave" Pelky stopped and stared at Shaemus in bug-eyed astonishment.

"What are you doing up at this hour?" the barber demanded.

O'Shea shrugged. "'Tis not of my choosin'," he said sheepishly. He pointed toward the lot next to his saloon where a construction crew was working. "Them spalpeens," he explained, "unloaded a cargo of canvas and lumber outside me window at eight o'clock. The mule skinner who drove the wagon bellowed like a banshee, then they flung each board down separate so's it would bounce the higher and make more noise. How's a man to sleep with such hullabaloos burstin' his ear drums?"

PELKY, whose militant wife insisted that he open his barbershop at nine o'clock sharp each morning, nodded sympathetically.

"This boom will be the death of us all," he complained. "I sheared thirteen men yesterday. Five of them were drunk, three had black eyes, and two wore hideout guns strapped to their left shoulders. Just as I was closing up a gambler named Ace-High Halliday threatened to shoot all the shaving mugs on my shelves unless I gave him a hair cut. Then, when I went to tell Sheriff Sam Odegarde about it, I learn Sam is out at the east end of the county investigating the death of a sheepherder. No telling what'll happen here now."

"A riffraff bunch," O'Shea reflected. "This town reminds me of Dodge City, which was a divil's den if ever I saw one. No wonder the railroad is bringin' its own peace officer to preserve law and order. Sheriff Sam couldn't cope with such wholesale shenanigans all by hisself."

Then a vague thought came to him, and he added: "Seems like I remember a man named Ace-High Halliday. What does he look like?"

"Medium tall, with a black mustache and shifty eyes."

"Must be a different galoot," Shaemus said. "The Halliday I knew didn't have a mustache."

Pelky glanced toward the Alhambra.

"What are they putting up next to your place?" he asked.

"A circus tent on a wood platform, by the look of it," Shaemus said. "Bad cess to 'em, for disturbin' my sleep." Then, as he observed workmen fastening guy-ropes to the east wall of his saloon, he blurted: "What do them banshee baboons think they're doin'?"

He strode down Main Street with more swiftness than Pelky had ever seen him move.

O'Shea's usually benign countenance bore the deep-rutted frown of a thoroughly wrathful Irishman.

"The brass of them dudes, hitchin' their dirty canvas to a respectable establishment!" he fumed, and was seething with righteous resentment when he rushed up to the trio of tent-raisers.

"That," he announced, pointing to the Alhambra, "is no public hitchrack. 'Tis private property!"

The nearest workman barely glanced at him before pounding another spike into the wall.

"Yore name O'Shea?" he asked.

"It is that," Shaemus declared. "And what might ye be up to?"

"Just usin' yore wall to anchor our guy-ropes," the man reported. "Boss said yuh wouldn't mind."

Sheer astonishment bugged O'Shea's eyes.

"Ah—so I wouldn't mind, wouldn't I? What does your boss take me for? A donkey-eared North-of-Ireland dude, or some goose-pimpled peddler fresh out of Kansas City? Does he think I'm a bull butterfly that'll be brushed aside by the flick of a hand?" He shook a big forefinger in front of the workman's face and shouted: "Go tell your boss that this saloon belongs to Shaemus O'Shea, blood brother of the Black O'Sheas, any one of which could lick ten of the likes of him with a broom handle before breakfast seven days a

week—and not miss early mass on Sunday mornin'!"

The workman took a moment to digest this Celtic harangue.

"Be gone with ye, now," Shaemus ordered, "and tell your boss I'll not be bamboozled by the hog-minded likes of him!"

"But my boss ain't a he," the man explained. "She's a she."

The surprise of that held Shaemus while he recalled the unsavory establishments run by painted ladies in Dodge City. He had always prided himself on running a highly respectable saloon. If one of those nefarious honkytonks should open next door it would ruin his reputation.

"What kind of a kickapoo place does your lady boss run?" Shaemus demanded.

"A high-class dance hall," the man informed. "Kate's Canvas Coliseum—one dollar a dance."

A sigh of relief slipped from O'Shea's lips. Anyone named Kate was likely to be Irish, in which case the establishment would be half-way respectable at least.

"But I still say ye'll not use my saloon for a hitchrack," Shaemus insisted. "Your boss bein' a woman don't change that at all, begorrah."

At that moment a sweet-toned voice with the lilt of a brogue in it, sounded directly behind O'Shea:

"Top of the morning to you, Shaemus."

O'Shea whirled, and stared.

"Kate Finucane, as I live and breath!" he said whisperingly.

SHE was a fine figure of a woman, this Kate Finucane. Garbed in a stylish gray gown and wearing a modest little pancake hat perched atop a proudly-held head, she was a woman to make any man think of moonlight and malarky.

"Ye look scarcely a day older," Shaemus declared, eyeing her in critical fashion, and reciting her charms. "Hair with the blue sheen of a soaring black falcon's wing, eyes green as the Emerald Isle, lips red as ripe cherries." Then he glanced at her ringless fingers. "Do ye mean to tell me there's been no weddin' bells in the ten years since I last saw ye in Dodge City?" he exclaimed.

"Not a bell, Shaemus," Kate Finucane said smilingly. She gestured toward the huge tent. "This belongs to my brother Pat, who's serving six months in Texas for half-killing two carpetbaggers with his fists. Pat should be free any day now."

But Shaemus O'Shea wasn't interested in that at all. He was endeavoring to guess Kate's age, to tally her years as compared to his own. She looked no more than thirty, yet she had seemed that old ten years ago. Perhaps, Shaemus thought eagerly, there wasn't so great a difference between his age and hers as he had imagined.

O'Shea stood straight as a buggy whip, wanting to appear younger and less paunchy than he felt. Bachelorhood was a fine thing for young bucks, but living alone plagued a man when he reached middle age. It made him want to stick his feet under his own table of an evening and eat home-cooked "vittles."

He recalled that Kate had kept company with a Texas cowboy called Jeff Blake.

"Didn't that proud-eyed Texan come back after the night ye saved his bacon by runnin' to fetch Marshal Masterson?" he asked.

"No," Kate said, and she was no longer smiling. "I didn't see Jeff again until a year ago, and he scarcely spoke. He's a railroad lawman now, Shaemus. They call him Blue Blake now, instead of Jeff, because he's so strict and solemn."

"Ah—then he's the one that's comin' here," O'Shea said thoughtfully. "I've heard tall tales about Blue Blake, never dreamin' he was the one I knew in Dodge. They say he hates all humanity, includin' himself." Then as he observed a tall, sober-faced man coming along the plank walk, he exclaimed: "Speak of the divils, here comes Blake!"

It was an odd thing, this meeting. And because Jeff Blake and Kate Finucane were part of O'Shea's robustious past, he felt ten years younger. Genuine pleasure showed on his smiling face as he shook hands with "Blue" Blake.

"'Tis like a reunion," Shaemus declared. "You and Kate and me all in the same town again."

A frugal grin briefly warmed Blake's lean, darkly handsome face.

"Glad to see yuh, Shaemus," he said, and went on without looking at Kate Finucane.

"Now why would Jeff pass ye by with-

out so much as a word?" O'Shea asked, deeply puzzled by such deliberate rudeness.

Kate shrugged. "He's a woman-hater, and I guess he hates me worst of all."

"But why?" Shaemus demanded. "Shure and he can't blame you because he knocked down a gunhawk hooligan whose three friends ganged up on him afterward."

"Jeff came close to dying that night," Kate said defensively. "He was no gunfighter—just a good-natured cowboy. Marshal Masterson told me afterward that Jeff knew he couldn't outshoot any one of those three gunhawks, and was pale as a ghost when Marshal Ed stepped up beside him. The marshal said he advised Jeff to get out of Dodge quick and stay out until he learned how to shoot fast. Jeff took his advice."

O'Shea watched Blake walk to Pelky's barbershop, his big black gun swaying gently in its tied-down halfbreed holster.

"Jeff had a right to be scared, him bein' no great shakes with a gun at that time," Shaemus said. "But he's got no right to treat ye so shamefully."

"I guess he thinks I was flirting with the man he knocked down," Kate explained. "Maybe I did flirt a trifle, Shaemus, but only to make Jeff want me the more."

"Ah—so that's how it is," O'Shea mused, seeing the misty shine of unshed tears in her eyes. "Jeff Blake is the reason there's been no weddin' bells, eh, Kate?"

She nodded.

" 'Twas in me mind to court ye, Kate," O'Shea said regretfully, "but I guess ye'll have a case on Jeff Blake as long as he lives."

Kate nodded again. . . .

By noon the big tent was securely pitched. When a piano and numerous benches had been installed, "Kate's Canvas Coliseum" was ready for business.

Other establishments were erected with equal swiftness. A shooting gallery tent rose next door to the dance hall. Across Main Street a crew of carpenters hammered huge sections of a clapboard cafe into place by mid-afternoon, and soon after that "Ace-High" Halliday, who had rented an abandoned building just west of O'Shea's saloon, hung out a big red-lettered sign which said:

HALLIDAY'S ALHAMBRA

Shaemus happened to be standing in the doorway of his establishment at the time. He squinted up at the sign, and swore gustily.

"The nerve of him!" he blurted. " 'Tis not enough that the spalpeen opens a saloon at me elbow—he borrows the good name of me place to boot!"

Shaemus strode up to the gaudy garbed gambler who was wiping his hands on a white silk handkerchief.

"You Ace-High Halliday?" he demanded belligerently.

The gambler nodded, and tugged thoughtfully on a waxed tip of his black mustache.

"It seems as if I've seen yore homely face somewheres before," he said, in a bland and brazen voice.

" 'Tis not faces I am discussin' at this time," O'Shea declared. "It's names. Business names. My establishment has been well and favorably known in this town for ten years as the Alhambra Saloon. I do not like the idea of a fly-by-night trap using the name Alhambra also."

Halliday laughed, and shrugged. He spoke to a blocky, gun-hung man who lounged in the doorway.

"Look who's objectin', Bart." And then, as he gave O'Shea's face a probing appraisal, he exclaimed: "I remember yuh now! Shaemus O'Shea, who wore an apron behind the bar at the Alamo in Dodge City."

"Seems like this is an unfriendly town, Boss," said Bart Hower, whose beefy, pock-pitted face wore a perpetual grin. "Marshal Blake says we can't keep open after midnight, Kate Finucane won't speak to yuh, and this ape-faced son don't like the name of yore joint."

Halliday chuckled, and as he did, O'Shea recognized him despite the mustache.

"Ain't you the one that Blake knocked down that night in the Last Chance Saloon?" he demanded.

"Yeah," Halliday said, and quit smiling. A savage scowl rutted his cheeks. "Blake got away with it because Ed Masterson butted in," he muttered angrily. "But he won't have Masterson with him when he tries to make me put out my lights at twelve tonight."

"We'll put somethin' out," Bart promised, and nudged the double-rigged guns he wore in tied-down holsters. "But it won't be our lamps."

"Blake's lamp might go out," Halliday said, and the coldly calculating tone of his voice told Shaemus all he needed to know.

Halliday hated Jeff Blake for the fist-whipping ten years ago and was eagerly waiting for a chance to settle that score. But Halliday wouldn't use his fists. He would use the hide-out gun Close-Shave Pelky had spoken about, and he would have Bart's guns to make it a cinch proposition. Blue Blake wouldn't have a chance to survive such a setup. All the gun skill in the world wouldn't help a man when the odds were that high against him.

Shaemus recalled what he had said to Kate Finucane—that she would have "a case" on Jeff Blake as long as he lived.

"What yuh goin' to do about my sign?" Halliday demanded.

Shaemus shook his head. He glanced at Bart's wickedly grinning face.

"Nary a thing," he muttered.

"Parable" Plunkett came across the street for his afternoon glass of Bourbon, and Shaemus walked hurriedly to the Alhambra Saloon. And because the high hope of courting Kate Finucane was like a warm glow inside him, O'Shea muttered thoughtfully:

"As long as he lives. . . ."

Shaemus was having a leisurely drink with Doc Plunkett at the bar when Jeff Blake came into the Alhambra.

"Have a drink on the house," O'Shea invited smilingly, and reached for his private bottle of Bourbon.

Blake shook his head. "Booze and a law badge don't mix," he said. "Especially in a tough town like this."

Plunkett, who had won the nickname of Parable because of his habitual spouting of philosophical phrases at the slightest provocation, smacked the rosewood bar with an age-mottled hand.

"I object!" he exclaimed pompously, and arranged his battered stovepipe hat at a more respectable angle. "Broken Bow is not tough in any sense of the word. It has been known far and wide as the finest town in Arizona Territory—a veritable paradise with its peaceful and prosperous populace abiding in harmonious fellowship."

"I suppose," Blake said sarcastically, "that the three shootin's and twenty-odd fights they had here durin' the last week are yore idea of harmonious fellowship."

PARABLE Plunkett smacked the rosewood again.

"I resent your flippant and fallacious interpretation of our town," he declared. "Broken Bow is not tough. It's the riff-raff bunch your railroad brought here that is tough. You have no right to malign the respectable population of Broken Bow by pestilential remarks about it's being a tough town, and I demand your apology!"

Blake ignored the old medico's request.

"I stopped by to tell yuh that a citizen's committee has agreed that all saloons and dancehalls shall close promptly at midnight," he said to O'Shea, "so our construction crews will be fit to work the next day. I expect yuh to observe the twelve o'clock curfew tonight and every night."

"So?" Shaemus said, not liking the autocratic tone of Blake's voice nor the arrogant expression on his frowning face. "Well, if it was me habit to remain open later I might question your curfew and tell the committee to mind their own blasted business. But I've always closed me place at midnight and will continue to do so."

"Good," Blake acknowledged without pleasure.

He was near the door when O'Shea asked slyly:

"Does Ace-High Halliday's lights go out at twelve also?"

"They will," Blake muttered, and went outside.

O'Shea downed his drink in thoughtful silence. Blake, he guessed, didn't realize what he would be up against at Halliday's Alhambra. Perhaps Jeff hadn't recognized Halliday as being the man he had knocked down that night in the Alamo, for the mustache changed Halliday's appearance considerably.

It occurred to Shaemus that he should warn Blake. But Jeff had refused an invitation to a friendly drink, referring to good Bourbon as booze. And he had talked with a badge-toter tone of voice. There could never be any close friend-

ship between them; merely a speaking acquaintance.

Shaemus shrugged. If Blue Blake got shot down at midnight that was his hard luck. And it might mean all the difference in the world to Shaemus O'Shea who stood no chance of courting Kate Finucane while Blake lived.

"A most unpleasant person," Parable Plunkett complained. "No wonder they call him Blue Blake."

"He's a woman-hater, Doc. The most beautiful female that ever braided her hair hurt Jeff's pride ten years ago."

"Pride—a drinkless trickle in the sands of time," Plunkett scoffed.

When Plunkett had departed and bar trade was quiet because of the supper hour, O'Shea sauntered into the wide doorway of Kate's Canvas Coliseum. The big tent was deserted, and he was returning to his saloon when Kate came along the sidewalk.

"It was in me mind to request the honor of escortin' ye to the Oriental Cafe for supper," Shaemus reported. "Am I too late?"

She nodded. "I've just finished, more's the pity," she said smilingly.

The sweet curve of Kate's smiling lips and the warm glow of her green eyes stirred O'Shea mightily. Here, he thought, was the grandest girl in all the land—a priceless gem of glorious womanhood. And except for Jeff Blake she might become Mrs. Shaemus O'Shea.

What could she possibly see in that frowning fool of a badge-toter? The man had no romance in him, no appreciation for the wondrous charms this colleen possessed so abundantly.

Yet Kate could see no other man while Blake lived. Well, by this time tomorrow, Blue Blake might not exist. Then, Shaemus reflected, there would be no barrier between him and Kate.

He was thinking about that, and enjoying a warm glow of anticipation, when Bart strode over from Halliday's Alhambra.

"Ace-High wants to borrow a couple of yore bracket lamps," Bart announced. "Two of our big chandeliers got broke on the way here, which means we've only got one left."

"Then why in Hooligan's name don't ye buy some lamps at the Mercantile?" O'Shea demanded.

"They're all sold out," Bart said. "Come on into yore place and I'll pick out the ones we want."

Resentment rose like a wave in Shaemus O'Shea.

"So ye'll pick and choose, will ye!" he exclaimed, and shook his fist in front of Bart's bulbous, pock-pitted nose. "Go tell Ace-High Halliday he'll get no lamps from me—not so much as a candle, begorrah!"

The gunman's grin didn't change. But his eyes changed, and Kate Finucane saw what was in them.

"Be careful, Shaemus," she said urgently.

Bart turned toward the Alhambra.

"I'll take what I want," he said. O'Shea stepped swiftly around him, reached his saloon doorway and stood there blocking the entrance.

"Ye'll not step foot in me place at all!" he declared, and heard the tap of Kate's high heels hastily departing.

BART eased up to the Alhambra stoop, wickedly grinning.

"I'll borrow some lamps from yuh, one way or the other," he insisted, and drew his right-hand gun.

"Ye wouldn't dast shoot a respectable citizen in his own doorway," O'Shea said, with more confidence than he felt.

Bart's grin deepened the ruts on his beefy cheeks.

"Mebbe yes, mebbe no," he said. "But one thing is shore. I'm goin' to bend the barrel of this gun on yore hard head if yuh don't step aside *muy pronto!*"

Shaemus O'Shea peered into Bart's cold eyes and knew the man meant it. And he guessed how easily Bart's gun would explode if he put up a struggle to fend off the blow that might crack his skull.

"Holster your pistol and fight with the tools Nature give ye," Shaemus invited.

But Bart shook his head. "This'll be quicker, and easier," he muttered, and moved forward.

"What's going on?" Marshal Blue Blake called sharply.

Bart sheathed his gun. He looked at Blake.

"I was tryin' to talk O'Shea into lendin' me a couple bracket lamps," he said casually. "But he don't seem to be in a

lendin' mood."

He walked off then, and Shaemus loosed a gusty sigh of relief.

"I got something important to tell ye," O'Shea said to Blake. Taking the marshal by the arm, he escorted him inside. "It'll sound better with a glass of good Bourbon."

And then Shaemus O'Shea, who couldn't court Kate Finucane while Jeff Blake lived, warned the railroad marshal against a death trap that awaited him at Halliday's Alhambra.

"They're goin' to shoot ye to doll ribbons, Jeff. They're goin' to gang up on ye so there'll be no chance at all."

And Blue Blake, who hadn't taken a drink of whisky for ten long, lonely years, downed two glasses of Bourbon between sundown and dark. . . .

Word of the impending showdown at Halliday's Alhambra spread rapidly through Broken Bow. By ten o'clock that night it had reached every home on Residential Avenue. Wild rumors and reports flooded the town. Men who had heard tall tales of Blue Blake's career as a gunslick town tamer, repeated every exaggerated story they had ever heard about him.

"Cold-eyed and cold-nerved," they said. "A natural born killer who never smiles."

By eleven o'clock small groups of curious citizens stood in dark passageways between buildings on Main Street, their eyes and voices sharp with anticipation as they discussed Blake's chances of success.

"He'll never reach the batwings," one man prophesied. "They'll shoot him down the moment he steps foot on the front stoop."

But another man disagreed. "Halliday is too smart for that," he said. "He'll wait till Blake tries to arrest him. Then somebody in the saloon crowd will take a sneak shot at Blake."

At eleven forty-five Bart Hower entered Halliday's Alhambra and spoke to his boss.

"All sorts of stories goin' around," he reported. "Nobody's seen Blake for the past couple hours. Some say he was seen boardin' a work train that went east. And the livery stable proprietor says a man rode off to get Sheriff Sam Odegarde. I looked into O'Shea's place three different times, but I didn't see Blake."

Halliday frowned. "The coyote might of got spooked and hightailed for the tules," he muttered. "But we'll get set for him in case he shows up."

During the next few minutes Bart and two other gunhung men took up strategic posts around the smoke-fogged, dimly lighted room so that the front doorway made a triple-pronged target for their waiting guns.

At five minutes to twelve Kate Finucane closed her Canvas Coliseum and found Shaemus O'Shea awaiting her on the sidewalk.

"Already closed me place," he told her. "I'll escort ye to the hotel."

"Do you think Jeff has a chance?" Kate asked nervously.

The deep worry in her voice roused a hot flare of jealousy in O'Shea. It seemed incredible that a woman would be so loyal to the man who had run off without saying good-by, after she had helped save his life.

"Blake had warnin' enough," Shaemus muttered. "I told him how Halliday was plannin' to trap him."

But he didn't tell her that he had promised to unlock his back door for Blake's use at midnight.

THE tightening pressure of Kate's fingers on his arm put a high gladness in O'Shea. "Thanks, Shaemus," she said. "You're the nicest man I ever knew."

And at this precise moment, as they were going up the Mansion House Hotel steps, a gun's muffled blast came from Halliday's Alhambra. O'Shea whirled.

"Halliday's lights went out!" he heard a man on the hotel veranda shout.

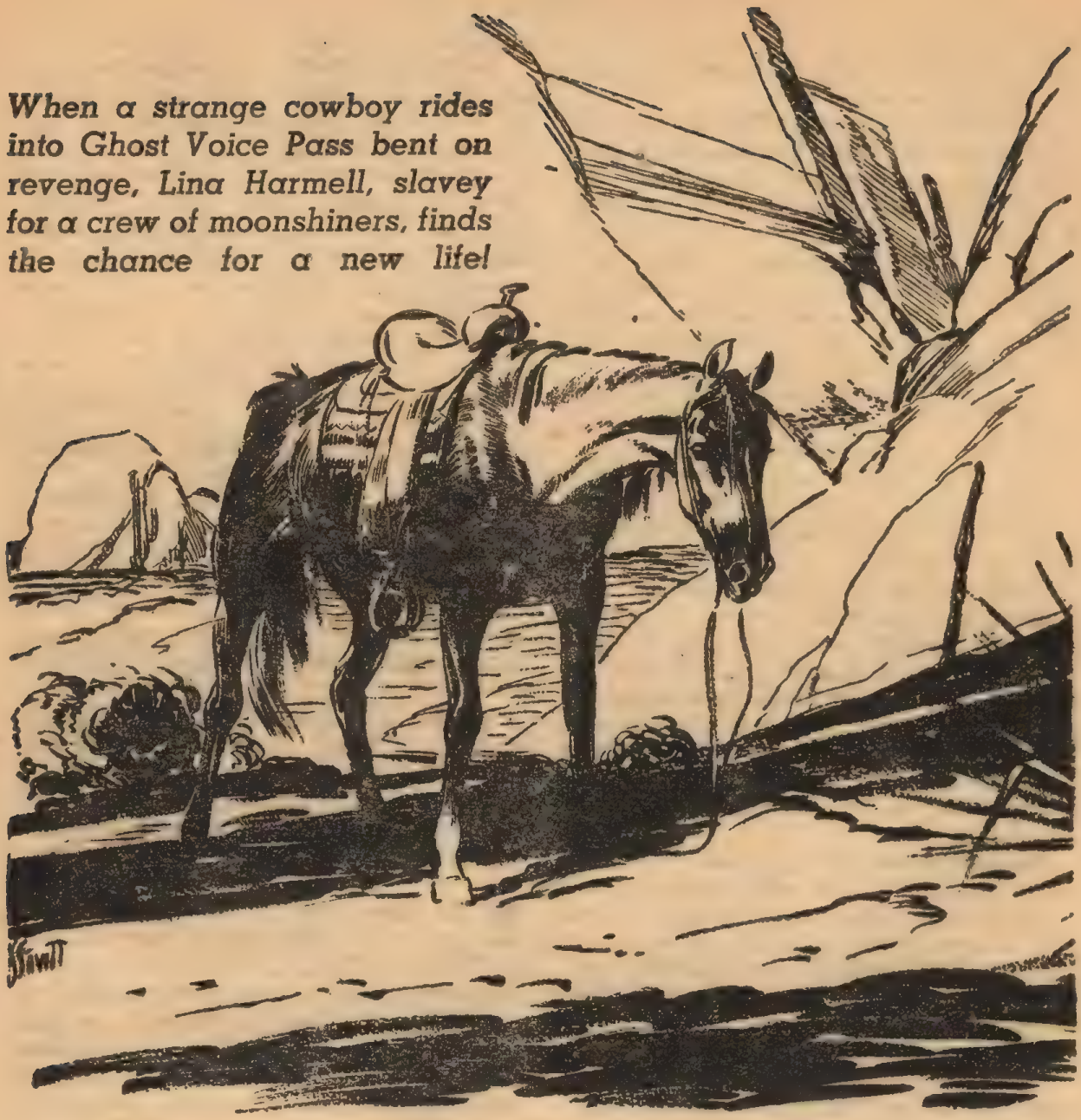
"Right on the dot at midnight, by grab!" another man yelled.

Then, as several guns exploded, a crowd of shouting railroad workers and shrieking percentage girls stampeded from Halliday's Alhambra.

Listening to the continuous firing, Shaemus knew what had happened. Blake had entered the saloon by its rear door, had shot out the single chandelier and endeavored to make his getaway across the yard to O'Shea's Alhambra's back door. But that door was locked, and so Blake was trapped!

(Continued on page 110)

When a strange cowboy rides into Ghost Voice Pass bent on revenge, Lina Harmell, slavey for a crew of moonshiners, finds the chance for a new life!



They found shelter in a natural cave, and

A Complete Novelet

SIX-GUNS AND

CHAPTER I

Stranger in the Whisky Mill

GOWD'S Roadhouse stood at the mouth of Ghost Voice Pass, an ugly square frame building partly hidden by trees. The yard was fenced in by crooked cottonwood poles, and served as a corral.

Lina Harmell, her arms dipped deep in soapy water, looked out through the window over the sink and counted seven horses in the yard. There was also a big freight wagon there, and a buckboard. The talk and the laughter coming from the big room beyond was loud and coarse, and by midnight, the girl knew, it would turn into an orgy of drunkenness and brawling.

Don Springer had to be helped to the ground

MOONSHINE

By
JOE ARCHIBALD

There were no open saloons in the cow-towns in this part of the state, the wets having been defeated in the elections almost a year ago. So the Gowds, having been more far-sighted than others of their ilk, had taken the law into their own hands and were prospering.

The smell of moonshine whisky vied with the kitchen smells. It was in the steam that rose up from the dishwater, and it made Lina Harmell a little sick, thickened the hate she had in her heart for the whole world and its people.

She could be as pretty as most girls she had seen, she knew, given a chance. Even as she was, in her dungarees, faded blue cotton shirt, and men's clumsy boots, she attracted the riff-raff coming to Gowd's

She had slaved for Kate Gowd for almost six months, ever since her father had died. At first, the shame of it had been almost unbearable, but as the days passed, it occurred to her that when it was over there would be no regrets, no painful memories to eat at her heart. Happiness was all right while it lasted. If the things you learned to love would not be taken away, you could keep faith.

Lina heard someone speak her name and she heard Kate Gowd's ugly laugh. Hardly a night passed at Gowd's when she did not have to fight someone, so she walked over to the big iron stove and picked up a steaming tea-kettle. She placed it on the sink near her elbow and went on with her work.

THE noise in the place suddenly burst out into the kitchen, and she knew a man had come in. The door closed shut, and she turned and faced a short, barrel-chested cowpuncher who had been around before.

"Have a drink," he said. "Why is it Kate never lets you have fun? We'll have a drink and maybe do a dance, huh?"

"Get out of this kitchen," Lina Harmell said, her face losing some of its color.

"Don't act that way now," the puncher said. "You ain't foolin' me. If you wasn't kind of free and easy you wouldn't work for Kate Gowd. Maybe I'll get you to like me."

He came toward the sink, breathing heavily, his hands outstretched. Lina picked up the kettle and threw it at him. It caught him full in the chest. The scalding water splashed his face and he let out a scream. Then Kate Gowd came in and drove the man out with her tongue.

"Too good for the kind I mix with, are you?" she said to the girl. "I'm good enough to give you a bed and enough grub to fill your stomach, Miss Princess. Lookin' for a white horse carryin' a prince? You better start lookin' for a good man. Now get back to them dishes!"

Kate Gowd stood there for a few moments, making sure her hired girl would obey her. She was a tall, thin woman with wispy black hair streaked with gray, and was shapeless in the dress she wore. Her eyes and lips were hard and cold.

She turned and went out and then there was a burst of laughter in the front room at something she said. Lina Harmell went grimly on with her work, trying not to think of happier times. But she could not forget the things she had loved, like the doll she got one Christmas, the little puppy her father had found in the brush and had brought to her. A baby sister who had lived only two years.

Just when she had loved them all so much, they had been taken from her. The little dog had been ground under the wheels of a freighter's wagon, the doll had been dropped down an old well.

The past was only a dream, especially that part of it where she had lived on a little ranch. Then hard times had come and her father had had to give up the ranch and try to make a living on the land. The hard work had killed her mother first. Then cattlemen had driven Wes Harmell out of his nester's shack and he had gone into town to die. He had a half-sister named Kate Gowd, had given her everything he had left.

No, Lina did not want to love anything again, ever. She would never let her heart get the better of her head and get tied up into painful knots again. At Gowd's you could easily forget that anything good ever existed, and perhaps that was the reason she stayed on.

She finished the stack of dishes, picked up a tray, and steeled herself to go inside and clear more dishes from the tables. The noise in there was building up. Just as she opened the door, the talk and laughter suddenly broke, and the reason for it stood near Kate Gowd's big cash register.

The man was sadly out of place in these surroundings, Lina knew. He was young, and there was that crystal clearness in his eyes that comes only from life spent mostly in the open. His skin was bronzed and packed nicely over the flat muscles of his face. He was a stranger here, and so was welcomed with distrust and veiled remarks. He seemed to recognize that there was danger all around him and one of his slim hands hung close to the handle of a six-gun.

"What you want here, mister?" Kate Gowd snapped.

"Frank Gowd here?" the rider asked. "I've heard this was a place a man could get the dust out of his throat."

He sniffed at the foul air of the place, and grinned. His glance suddenly shifted toward Lina Harmell, and an expression of puzzlement wiped his smirk away. She tried to stare him out of countenance, but finally

turned her head and picked the dishes off a table. The sense of shame she thought she had lost forever crept into her and made her want to drop the tray and run. She hoped Kate Gowd would drive him out of the roadhouse, or set her wolves upon him.

"Sit down," Kate Gowd said to the stranger. "I'll see you get a drink."

Lina took her time with the tray, was aware that all of Kate Gowd's customers were also biding their time. The stranger got his drink and lifted it up to the light.

"You man enough to down it?" Kate Gowd said in a dangerous voice.

"I figure so," the stranger snapped, tipped his head back, and let the fiery stuff pour down his throat.

He shut his eyes and a shiver went through his body. He started coughing and the tears streamed out of his eyes.

"You ain't used to strong drink, my friend," Kate Gowd said. "What you doin' here?"

A BULKY man got up from his chair.

"Frisk him, Kate," he said, and there was a gun in his hand. "Lawman, maybe. Enforcin' that dry law we didn't want."

The woman ripped open the stranger's shirt.

"No sign of a badge," she said, then went through his pockets.

"Women do your dirty work around here?" the young rider taunted the man with the Colt.

"Let him be, Kate. I'll shut his big mouth. Get up out of that chair!" The husky man holstered his gun.

"Glad to oblige," the stranger said, and Lina backed against the wall, trying not to scream.

The heavy-set tough lunged at the unwelcome visitor, and was sent back on his high heels by a fist that made a sickening cracking sound as it landed. He spun drunkenly, then grunted with agony when another sledge-hammer blow got him square in the middle.

He was writhing on the floor when Kate Gowd threw the bottle. It missed the stranger and smashed through the window. Lina Harmell screamed now. Seven men were rushing the stranger and one of them had a gun.

"Smash him!" Kate Gowd screeched.

A gun went off and a man staggered backwards and sat down heavily. The other range wolves hesitated, cowed by the blaze in the stranger's eyes.

"I'll stop by again, ma'am!" the rider said. "I want to see Frank Gowd."

He turned and went out, slamming the door behind him. There was a shot and a bullet chugged into the pine slab door, low. The half-drunken puncher got up off the floor, blood streaming from his mouth. Kate Gowd shoved him off his feet again and he fell across a table.

"One man, hardly dry behind the ears," she said, "and all of you salty cusses couldn't handle him!" She swung her rage against Lina. "Get out into the kitchen, you brat!"

Lina somehow managed to get strength back into her legs. Once in the kitchen, she fell onto an old couch and let reaction drain slowly out of her. It had been a long time since a breath of fresh air, something clean and strong, had come to Gowd's. In the face of it, she had felt small and evil herself, and she wondered what had been in that man's mind when he had stared at her so long.

She got up, went to the sink, and drew cool water out of the pump, then scrubbed her face and hands until they glowed red. But it takes more than soap and water to get the grime from a person's soul. She looked at herself in a mirror and slowly shook her head.

"Get those thoughts out of your mind," she told herself. "You will have nothing but ugliness to remember, if you stay here. But remembering ugliness causes no pain."

Kate Gowd came in, her deep-set eyes still smoldering.

"Just happened to remember you tryin' to warn him," she said. "You think the likes of him would look at you twice? I ever catch you talkin' to him, if he lives long around these parts, I'll spoil your silly pretty face with boilin' water! You hear me?"

"I heard you," Lina said. "Don't worry, Kate Gowd. I've been here too long to hope for anythin' better."

"Now you're gettin' smart," Kate said.

CHAPTER II

Lina's Secret

LINA finished her work at nine o'clock. The rest of the dregs left by Kate

Gowd's rabble could be cleaned up in the morning. She went out to a sway-backed barn and got her old pinto horse and rode through the pass. Only when she had these dark hours to herself and she was in the saddle was life worth living.

She rode slowly for nearly a half-hour then, rounding a sharp bend in the narrow road where an outcropping of rock hung perilously overhead, she saw a rider blocking her way. Fright clutched at her until he spoke.

It was a soft, gentle voice and she wondered if it was the voice of one of the ghosts that was supposed to haunt the pass. They came down at night from the ruins of a ghost town three miles away, folks said. They got weary of their own drab surroundings.

A match snapped and was held close to a face. The face smiled, and then it was in darkness again.

"Why don't you go away from here?" Lina choked out. "Let me by."

"I was watching for tougher game," the man said. "My name is Dan Springer. What in the name of Tophet are you doin' in a rathole like that one of Gowd's, ma'am?"

"We can't all ride free," the girl said. "Or be free in any way. What are you looking for here? A man named Frank Gowd?"

"Among other things. Aren't you afraid when that bunch of range scum comes to that house to drink moonshine, girl?"

"You can get over being afraid of anything, Dan Springer," Lina said. "Times come when nothing means anything."

Springer leaned on the pommel, tried to get a clearer picture of her face in the thin wash of starlight.

"You're young, girl. You're pretty, and to hear that kind of talk coming from you, when it should only come from an old man or old woman, is all wrong."

"Age shouldn't be counted by years," the girl said, and his presence in the pass stirred her to anger she herself could not account for.

She was about to force her pinto against the black he rode when the beat of hoofs could be heard coming from the direction of Gowd's.

"Can't let them catch you talkin' to me," he said quickly. "Quick—get into the timber."

Lina swung her horse out of the path, rode up the rocky bank and out of sight in the pines. She could hear the hoofbeats pound closer and closer, and still Springer sat his horse directly in the middle of the narrow road. Soon she heard a man call out.

"Get out of the road!" he ordered, and emphasized it with a curse.

"Where's Frank Gowd?" Springer asked.

"You!" came the hoarse reply. "What you doin' around here, mister? Lookin' for moonshine? Nothin' in these parts we hate worse'n a dry enforcement officer. Nobody lives shorter lives. It's a man's right to have a drink when he wants it, *sabe*? He'll want it worse when the Law says he can't have it, and he'll always get it! You can bust a still wide open and two others spring up!"

"Much in what you say," the man on the black bronc admitted. "None of my business how much a man wants to drink. That is, when he don't have to pay half a month's wages for a bottle of the stuff that ain't worth a dollar. Ranchers figure their hands will have to get their moonshine money by crooked means. They get a big thirst and happen to be broke, they'll rustle a few head of stock. See what I mean, mister?"

"So you do wear a badge somewheres," the man from Gowd's spat. "Lookin' for the still! Couple of other men tried. Haven't seen 'em ever ride out of this part of the country."

"Sometimes a man gets some imitation stuff that kills him," Springer said. "Sometime a skunk gets a little drunk and can't tell wood alcohol from the real thing. That's a plain killin'."

"Nobody ever died from it around here. What are you buildin' up to, mister?"

"Go on by," Springer said, and hoofs clicked against the shale, and bit chains rattled. "You're not Frank Gowd?"

"No, worse luck," the rider said. "He'll be rich in a couple of years."

"Figure they'd never voted dry in this part of the country," Springer called out, "if somebody like Gowd didn't see the votes were cast right."

"You better figure one thing only, stranger—how quick you can drift out of this neck of the woods," a voice came back with a gust of wind.

A horse quickened its pace, its hoofbeats dying somewhere up the pass, and Lina Harmell came down out of the timber. She stopped her pinto close to Dan Springer.

"You're either crazy or you're a fool," she said. "Even honest men will fight for the right to have their whisky, Springer. Even

they hate men who try to force an unjust law."

"You're pretty," Springer said. "Seems like you can't have good sense yourself living with people like the Gowds. After all, there's better places to go if you have to work for a livin'."

"What I am and what I do is none of your business!" the girl said angrily.

"Too bad it ain't," the rider said. "I'd have you out of that cesspool by sunup."

"Maybe I like it there."

"And maybe you're lyin'."

SHE struck him across the face with a leather glove, and then tried to follow it up, but he suddenly jerked her out of her saddle and drew her, kicking widely, across his own. He struck her once with the flat of his hand where pride stings worse than does the flesh, then eased her to the ground.

"Just to show you what little chance you'd have against one of Gowd's toughs if he took a notion to try and chew you up," he said.

He reined the black around then, and rode swiftly up the pass.

Lina Harmell, quivering with rage, picked up a rock and threw it into the darkness. Then she went to the bank, fell into the grass, and began to cry for the first time since she had come to live under the Gowd's roof.

The weakness she had fought against for many days was strong within her now. She had not been accustomed to the sight of many good men. Springer's eyes haunted her as she lay sprawled there, and she wanted to believe a certain light she had seen in them had really been there.

And then those other things she had come to love so much were clear in her mind, and once more she felt the ache of their swift passing. She got up, her lips pressed tightly together, and walked to the pinto.

She rode back to Gowd's and heard the coarseness of the place as she went upstairs to her room and barred her door. There she sat in the dark and built a wall of bitterness around her heart and swore that when they found a certain man dead on the trail, it would not concern her at all.

Late the next afternoon, Lina was mopping the surfaces of the wooden tables when Frank Gowd came in. He was a tall, ungainly man, more bone than flesh, and he had tobacco-stained loose lips. The whites of his eyes were yellowish, his glance was shifty.

"Had some trouble here last night, Kate?" he asked his wife.

"We did. The drunken bums here weren't no help to me, Frank. I've sent Monk Zorn out to try an' get some kind of a line on the man."

"Heard he kept askin' for me, Kate. Remember him from anywhere?"

Kate Gowd shook her head. "We got suspicious of him when he couldn't stand the stuff we sell."

Gowd laughed, turned, and watched Lina Harmell for a moment.

"In the cities, Kate," he said, "they use a woman to put a man where other gents want him. We could fix her up prettier'n she is, and she'd do."

The door opened and Zorn came in. One side of his face glistened with the salve he had smeared on it. The scalding water out of the tea-kettle had raised blisters on his skin. He looked at Lina and his eyes burned.

"Looks like you ain't the right man, Monk," Frank Gowd said. "What you find out about the man I sent you after?"

"Name's Springer. Works for Al Gester at the Tadpole."

Gowd looked puzzled. "Gester? That rancher likes his whiskey, Monk. He never complained about the price he pays for it. He wouldn't hire a dry enforcement officer."

"Maybe Gester doesn't know," Kate said. "Maybe that Springer is workin' two jobs, Frank."

"There'll be another ghost ridin' the pass before long," Monk said, and grinned. He kept watching Lina.

Gowd went upstairs. He came down, wearing fresher looking dungarees, threw a torn pair onto a chair.

"Get the girl to mend 'em, Kate. Figure I better be ridin' back and see if things are workin' the way they should. You come along, Monk. Lot of stuff to turn out today."

Lina finished with the tables. She picked up Gowd's faded dungarees and took them out into the kitchen, where she got a big needle and some heavy thread and sat down by the window to do her work. The cuffs of the dungarees had been rolled up and as she straightened them out chunks of rock rattled to the floor.

Lina mended a tear in the heavy cloth, put the dungarees aside, and got the broom to sweep up the dirt. The sun streamed through the window and made a chunk of rock glitter as she picked it up. She exam-

ined it quickly, then slipped it into her pocket. Her heart thumped wildly as she gathered up the rest of the sweepings and dropped them into a small paper bag.

Kate Gowd came in.

"We've got to know why that man is in these parts," she said. "Why he wants to see Frank. You'll find out for us. You'll use what looks you got and act mighty sweet when you see him. Go get your horse and take a ride. Better take a sandwich or two with you, for you might have to look for him longer than we think."

LINA was about to protest when it quickly occurred to her that this was a chance to get to town alone.

"All right," she said obediently. "If that is what you want."

"You seem too willing," Kate Gowd sneered. "The man wasn't bad-lookin', but don't start-gettin' romantic ideas, you little fool. No good fallin' in love with a man who is as good as dead."

"I know that," Lina said, fear as sharp as a knife-blade drawing an edge across her heart.

She went to the sink and drew fresh water.

"I mended the dungarees," she said. "They're on the table."

A half hour later she was riding up the pass, and when she came to the place where Springer had intercepted her the night before, her pulse quickened, but she was sure it was caused by returning anger. She was going to see a man in Wagonwheel she felt she could trust to share a secret, one that might forever rid her of the Gowds.

She rode into the town an hour before dusk and tied her horse to the rack in front of the hardware store. Then she looked up at a window, across which were black letters that said:

AMOS HOLMAN
MINING CONSULTANT—ASSAYER

Holman was an elderly man with a wide reputation for square dealing. He glanced up curiously at Lina Harmell and nodded as she entered his office.

"I have some samples of ore," Lina said, in a half-frightened voice. "I thought you'd tell me if they're real."

Holman folded up his newspaper and placed it on his desk, smiling softly.

"Been around a long time, ma'am. Never saw a lady prospector." He got up and moved a chair close to his own. "Sit down, Miss—?"

"Harmell," the girl said, and Holman's brows crept down closer to his eyes.

"You live with the Gowds," he said.

"Yes, but I want to get away," Lina said. "It was a roof when I needed it."

She dumped the contents of the paper bag on Holman's desk. He picked up a chunk of rock and stared at it closely, turning it this way and that.

"Reckon there's grains of gold in it," he said, and the girl's heart jumped. "Where did you get it?"

"I can't say," Lina said.

"Only gold around these parts," Holman said, getting up and walking around," is in Moger's Canyon. Most likely this stuff come from there. The mine was worked, ma'am, then proved to be not worth the labor. The town that sprung up died overnight. It's now a place of ghosts."

The girl nodded, a heaviness of spirit coming over her again.

"Thank you," she said. "I think you're right."

She quickly stiffened in her chair, and Holman stepped toward her and asked her if she was all right.

"It's a disappointment, ma'am. You think all of a sudden you're rich, then—" He gestured wearily with his hands. "But most folks can't appreciate the real riches. Don't come out of the ground, they come straight out of the heart."

"It wasn't because of the samples," Lina said, and got up.

Her legs seemed weak under her. For all at once she had found out something that it was dangerous to know—the location of Gowd's moonshine still.

She walked out of Holman's office with a different secret from the one she had brought in, and her woman's curiosity began to scatter caution. It occurred to her that if she could smash the Gowds quickly, a man's life would be spared, and she knew as she got out into the street that the prince Kate Gowd had taunted her about, had come to the town of Wagonwheel.

She judged Moger's Canyon to be at least seven miles away as she got into her saddle. What she would find there Lina had no idea, but it was suddenly important to know if her suspicions were correct.

CHAPTER III

Ghost Town Girl Prisoner

DAN SPRINGER took a narrow road that led from the Tadpole's north pasture when his day's work was done.

"I got a little business on my mind," he flung at two of Gester's riders as he broke away.

An hour later, he got off his horse to drink from a shallow cool stream. He drew the water through his parched lips, lifted his head quickly, and stared at the little stream that made a singing racket over the stones.

He smacked his lips, bent down and took another drink, then grinned crookedly when he lifted himself to his full height. He looked upstream, got on his black and followed the course of the waterway. . . .

It was dark when Linda Harmell rode out of a swatch of pine in Moger's Canyon and looked down on the ghost town. Each crumbling shack was etched eerily against the heavier gloom of a great rocky wall, and out of their midst rose the ghostly boxlike structure of an ore-crusher.

Her nerves taut, she rode toward the forgotten settlement, along a path that was now overgrown with foxtail, galatea grass, and weeds. Doors swung idly on creaking, rusty hinges, and she could smell the decay coming out of the broken windows. Little sounds swept in and over the girl, like ghost voices.

She told herself to turn and ride swiftly away from there, but an uncanny temptation to investigate further quickly overcame her better judgment. Dismounting from the pinto she tied it to an old tree in the shadows of one of the shacks, then walked inside.

Dust was thick on the broken furiture. Cobwebs brushed against her face. She heard a sound, and at the same time felt a presence there. Terror drained the strength out of her and she leaned against the wall and stared at the darkness of a doorway leading to another room.

She looked at a broken window, saw a face, and nearly screamed. In a moment the face was gone, and the girl was running toward the door when a man blocked her way.

"Stay where you are," a low voice said. "Saw you come in on that pinto. You're really one of the Gowds."

"Springer!" Lina whispered, and felt as happy and relieved as a little child who has been lost and found again. "Get out of here!" she said. "Please take me with you."

"Maybe I'm a fool," Springer said. "But I'll go along with you for a little while longer, girl. You knew about this place all along?"

"No," Lina said, and the nearness of the rider dispelled her terror for the moment. "But you don't believe me."

"We're gettin' out of here and hidin' that bronc of yours," Springer said. "There's a stronger shack just up the street, closer to that ore-crusher. A spooky place, and maybe we're both wrong. Haven't heard a voice or seen a living thing but you."

He took her arm and led her out into the night. The darkness was heavy and inky now, and the stars in the sky were like sparkling tiny sequins set in a great velvet-black curtain. He quickly untied the pinto.

"Wait here," he said, and led the horse up to a clump of jackpine.

Lina could hardly breathe. The darkness pressed against her like a material thing trying to crush her.

It seemed a long time before Springer returned. When he did he walked with little sound, like one of the ghosts down in the pass. He took her by the arm.

"We've got to walk close together even if it bothers you," he said, drew her close to him and walked up the weed-choked street, keeping close to the fronts of the shacks.

Lina was not as frightened now, and the thought that someone was trying to protect her was deliciously warming.

"Here," he said, and drew her in through a doorway. "There are some rafters up near the roof where a man can hide. A kind of loft. In back there's only the rock wall. I figure to work from here. I—"

A rifle cracked and a bullet came through the door and thudded into the floor near a rusty stove.

"Looks like they know," Springer said. "Well—"

He drew his gun, and she could tell by his voice that he was well-aware of the odds against him. Outside in the dark, boots slipped on gravel.

"Get down on the floor, ma'am," Springer said. "Behind the stove."

"No!" she whispered. "They won't harm me too much, Springer. Hurry, climb up to the rafters!"

Before he could reach out to stop her, she ran out of the house and called Gowd's men by name.

"Monk! Drago!" her voice echoed shrilly through the darkness.

SPRINGER jumped high into the air, caught at a rafter, and drew himself up. Then he crawled along cross-beams until he felt planking under him. He wormed his way close to the eaves, curled up like a cat, and waited. The voices outside came nearer, until they were in the room below.

"You could have been drilled easy, you little fool!" a gravelly voice said. "What you doin' up here, Lina? If Gowd finds out he'll fix you."

"I was sent out to look for Springer," Lina said. "Kate said to play up sweet to the man and find out what he was doing around here. I lost my way and found myself in the canyon, Monk."

"We got to tell Frank Gowd, Monk," the other man said. "He don't trust this girl too much. If she happens to lead the law in here I figure we get plugged before anybody else."

"Why should I lead the law against the Gowds?" Lina asked, her voice run through with fear. "They gave me a roof over my head."

Dan Springer saw a tall man moving through the dark outside. He could see out of the opening between the roof and the planked wall. He guessed it was Frank Gowd and his hands itched for his six-gun. He heard the girl cry out when Gowd walked into the room. The place was alight now. One of the men had apparently touched off a lantern.

"A man could of heard you yell all the way to Wagonwheel, Lina," Gowd said to the girl. "Hurry up and talk!"

"She got here by accident, Frank," Monk said. "Why should she want to trail us?"

After a few moments of silence, Gowd said:

"So you're here, and here's where you stay. Kate'll have to get another girl. Monk, start cleanin' this shack up in the mornin', as she's goin' to keep house for a while. Should've thought of it before. Your cookin' has been givin' me ulcers. Get her horse and put it in the brush corral."

"You mean I can't leave here, Gowd?" Lina asked in a small voice. "I'm a prisoner?"

"You said right," Gowd snapped. "Maybe that lawman is a reader of story books, and when he finds out the big bad hombres have you locked up in a castle, he'll come to your rescue, which is what we'd like to have happen. You won't be lonesome here. Monk will see to that, huh, Monk?"

"Figure I will, Frank," Monk said thickly. "She needs tamin'."

"I'll get the pinto," the man called Drago said.

"I'll get away from here!" the girl cried. "You can't watch me every minute, Gowd!"

"Where'll you run to?" Gowd ripped out. "You do get away, you better not show up at the roadhouse or in Wagonwheel, Lina. I figure you'll stay."

Springer heard the men go out. He heard the girl move around for a few moments, and then all he could hear was her crying. He wriggled out onto the planked floor and stretched his legs and arms, then looked down through the cross-beams at Lina who was looking up at him and drying her eyes with a handkerchief.

For the first time he saw how pretty she was, and how small. He called to her in a loud whisper, and she hurried to the door and looked out. After a while she came back in and looked up at him again.

"Don't be afraid," he said. "And thanks."

"You've got a chance to slip away," she said. "Take it, or I won't give you a second one. I could turn them loose on you and make things easier for me, Dan Springer. I want you to go away and keep away."

"You'd sooner throw in with Monk?" the rider asked her, slowly shaking his head. "You're afraid of him, but more scared of somethin' else, Lina. Scared of livin', it seems to me. No more fight left in you than in a mouse. Sorry, but I don't figure to leave you alone with that range scum, girl. If I get away from here, you go along."

"Don't be a fool!" Lina said, forcing a cold smile to her lips. "Why should I go with you?"

"No time to answer that," Springer said. "I hear somebody comin' back. All right, when he gets here, tell 'em I'm up here, Lina. Then jump for cover because I got six shots that itch to bite at skunk meat."

He moved back over the planks, slowly taking his Colt from its holster. He heard

Monk's soft laugh, heard a door slam shut.

"Brought some wood, Lina," Monk said. "Get busy with the stove. Figure it'll work yet, and we've got to be cozy here."

THE girl went over to the old stove and began cleaning out the fire-box. She felt Monk's eyes on her and knew all his badness shone in them now. She also was sure Monk was feeling the pain of scalding water again. She tried not to betray in any way the fact that there were more than two people in the shack as she crammed old newspapers into the fire-box and piled the wood on top of it.

"You're prettier here than at Gowd's," Monk said, half under his breath.

She said nothing. She lighted the newspaper with a hand that shook and when the stuff caught, slammed the door shut, stood up, and brushed loose strands of silky brown hair away from her eyes.

Monk took a flat bottle from his pocket and had a long drink. He kept watching her as she moved about the room, slapping dust off the old table and the two broken-backed chairs. She wanted as much noise as possible lest Monk could hear Springer's breathing.

The stove crackled. Monk got up quickly and stood staring at her, a wicked grin on his face. Suddenly he lunged forward and caught her by the arm, swung her against him and bent her head back. She got the heels of her hands against his chin and shoved him backward until he fell over one of the chairs.

She picked up a stick of wood and backed against the wall, and still there was no sound from above. This was her fight and Dan Springer was letting her have it, she thought. He wanted proof that she liked the kind of life she led at Gowd's. He wanted to be sure she had lied to him out in the pass.

A laugh slipped from her throat as she watched Monk coming slowly toward her again.

"All right, Lina," Monk said. "I can take my time. We've got tonight and a lot of other nights. I've got to beat you, it looks like, but I won't hurt your pretty face."

He sat down by the table and pinned her to the wall with his hungry eyes.

"You've got to belong to somebody. Anybody else at Gowd's better'n me? You lookin' for that gent on a white horse Kate tells about?"

"Maybe there's somebody," Lina said, the words leaping unbidden from her lips. "Keep away from me, Monk."

"You'll get tired holdin' that stick of wood. You'll get mighty sleepy before much longer." Monk took the bottle out of his pocket again and had another drink of Gowd's moonshine. "Good as the gold that used to come out of the ore-crusher," he said. "Gowd's stuff is even better. Couldn't drink gold and have it, too."

Lina moved away from the wall, the stick of wood still in her hand. She stumbled over a warped floor-board, and Monk rushed toward her and caught her in his arms before she could get her balance. She screamed as his rough beard scraped her cheek, became nauseated with the smell of his breath.

She fought with all her strength, terrified at the sudden thought that perhaps she had been wrong in her judgment of Springer. Monk's arms had her pinned as if they had been heavy baling wire, and she felt her senses giving way.

She had bent her head back to evade Monk's ugly mouth when she saw Springer drop off the cross-beams. He hit the floor close to Monk, and the rotting boards nearly caved in under him. As in a dream Lina felt herself thrown against the table, dimly saw Monk try to get his six-gun clear.

Springer's fist hit Monk squarely in the face, and the man went crashing into the hot stove. He screamed and bounded toward Springer, to get a heavy fist in the stomach. He pitched forward on his face, his breath strangled in his throat.

"Go, Dan Springer!" Lina Harmell called. "While there's time!"

"Not alone," the puncher said, and grinned. "Found out somethin' for sure, Lina. Stick close to me, you hear?"

Monk was on his hands and knees when Lina shouted a warning. She crashed into Springer, heard Monk's bullet slice close to her head and bite into the wall. Off balance, Springer fired his own Colt and Monk had just reached his feet when the bullet got him in the chest.

"They'll be coming!" Lina screamed, and pulled at the puncher's arm. "Don't stand there like a wooden man!"

"Got to think, an' fast, Lina!" Springer said. He jumped over Monk's body and took the lantern off the nail near the stove. "Figure this whole business'll go up like matchwood. Start runnin' for the pines out back,

girl!" He smashed the lantern against the wall. "Run, Lina!"

CHAPTER IV
Fleeing Outlaw Wrath

THE flames leaped up, licked hungrily at spilled oil. Springer made sure of its headway, then rushed out into the dark, bent low. He heard wild yells from the direction of the ore-crusher as he raced after the girl. He called to her just as a rifle went into play, making a sound like the crack of a bull-whip.

Lina cringed as the bullet raked along the boards of the shack not more than six inches above her head. "Dan!" she called hoarsely. "Over here!"

She saw him whirl in his tracks and fire a shot before he answered her. The line of shacks were already blazing furiously, the fire rushing before a steady breeze, and there was no longer the protection of the dark for them. They heard Frank Gowd's booming voice.

"Get 'em!" he shouted. "Cut 'em down!"

Lina ran blindly just as Dan got to her, and a bullet from a rifle kicked up the hard ground near her feet. He caught her by her leather belt and half-dragged, half-carride her into a narrow areaway.

"How many men—Gowd got?" he choked, as sparks from the inferno showered them.

"A dozen!" Lina said. "Maybe more."

He let her go, rushed her before him along the narrow path between the rocky wall and the rotten rear porches of the houses.

"Up there—the dead tree, Lina!" he said. "There's a kind of flume washed out by the years. Goes right up that wall to the pines. My bronc—there."

The rifles kept barking, bullets cutting haphazardly through the burning buildings. Gowd still raged, punctuating his orders with oaths. The girl felt Gowd's domination. But when fear and habit made her hesitate, Dan Springer thrust her into a stumbling retreat.

"Your horse!" she cried. "What then?"

She knew she could not go back to the roadhouse. And she knew little about this man who had wrought the sudden violent change in her life. Only that he reminded her of a life she had not wanted to remember, her early sweet years.

"They'll ring this canyon and cut us down, Dan!" she panted. "They know the trails that lead away from it—there aren't many."

"I expect to live a reasonable span of years," he said, and helped her up the flume that the rushing water of centuries had cut down and through the rocky fifty-foot wall. In many places, stone steps had been carved out of the rock, seemingly by the hands of giants, so the struggle upward was not too difficult.

Near the top, where timber began, Dan Springer turned quickly and fired downward. A man screamed and an answering shot clipped needles from a branch close to the cowboy's elbow. He heard his horse whinny nervously, frightened by the fire smell.

Lina Harmell began to run blindly, hopelessness and terror driving her. She heard the puncher calling to her, heard him crashing through the underbrush on her heels, and she screamed at him to let her go. Then he had hold of her and he whirled her around and hard against him.

"Scared little animal!" he said, and slapped her face until her senses clouded. "What's the matter with you? I'm not Monk!"

She was lifted up as if she had been a feather and carried to the little glade where the black horse sniffed at the air and stamped restlessly at the ground.

"We've got little time!" Dan gasped. "Don't make it tougher for me, Lina. Don't make me knock you out!"

Ten minutes later, she was clinging to him as they rode a winding dim trail higher toward the sky. Behind, the ghost town was a great torch, lighting the countryside for miles around. Behind them was the hurried beat of hoofs.

"You fool!" she kept saying. "Almost every hand around here will be against you when the news gets out what you've done. Oh, you fool!" she repeated. "Men have to have their whisky! Who are you to say they can't?"

"Got my reason to smash Gowd," he said, and suddenly swung off the old beaten path. "If you've got an idea I'm a law officer, get it out of your mind." He glanced back. "Got him where it hurts him bad. All that grain in the ore-crusher goin' up in smoke. Figure to hurt him in a worse place, though."

The horse clambered up to a limestone rim,

nose pointed at the sky, and Lina held on for dear life, expecting every moment that the black would tumble over backward and take them both with it. The spume from the mount's mouth flecked her cheeks and Dan sleeved it from his eyes.

On the brink, the horse slipped, pawed crazily for a few breathless moments, then lifted itself and its burden to the rim with a mighty effort. It stood there, legs quivering, head down, sweat dripping from its hide. Springer slipped out of the saddle, Lina dropping to the ground with him.

FAR below they could see half a dozen riders keeping to the defined trail. Lina let her face nestle in the dewy grass and weariness began to cling to her bones. She heard Dan Springer's heavy breathing as he lay prone, close to her, and she still felt the sting of his hand on her cheek.

For a long time he did not say anything.

"Try and sleep," he finally said, lifting his head. "We can't move along until morning. The needles back in there under the pines are mighty soft. Take a blanket off my saddle."

"In a little while," she said, "I want to listen to the quiet. It has a sound. I want to stay up here, even if it means I die. I'm tired of being afraid—and remembering."

"What are you tryin' to forget?"

"Things I loved very much." She turned her face away from him. "Happiness lasts only as long as you have the things you love, and when they are gone, the hurt is almost too much to bear."

"That's crazy, Lina," he said. "That's self-pity. If you mourn the loss of something because of your own feelings, you are more sorry for yourself than for the people or things you lost. I have lost a few things in the past myself, but I like to remember them. A brother, for instance. The fun we had together, the things he used to say, and do. I like to remember the way he laughed.

"I shot a horse once, and I remember how grateful it looked when I put the gun to its head. I even like to remember that, Lina. You could not find the courage to look back to the good things, so you lived with scum like the Gowds because there would not be anything worth remembering after being there a while."

She felt ashamed and could not find the right words with which to give him an answer. She knew he was right and loved him for his wanting to remember. And she knew now that she would always need him to give her the courage and the strength that had nearly been sapped out of her.

She looked toward the shuddering blood-red glow in the sky over Moger's Canyon, and thought of Monk. It seemed like a nightmare. It was hard to believe that Dan Springer had killed a man, that he alone had destroyed Gowd's whisky plant.

"Funny," he said. "I stopped to have a drink of water, and found out where the Gowds made their moonshine. You did not tell them the truth when you said you came there by accident, Lina."

She told him how she had happened to come to the ghost town.

"Sometimes we have little to do with our actions, Lina," he said. "There is a directing hand that often pulls at the reins. I hope He stays with us for a little while longer. We have little food, only one horse, and right now those outlaws will be hemming us in. I'm painting the picture as it is, and not trying to sugar it. More than the Gowd gang will turn their hand against me. Dry enforcement officers, with or without authority, are hated. You have time to get out of this. There's my horse. You can tell them I used you for a shield."

Lina pulled herself to her feet, looked down at Springer.

"I have no one," she said. "I'll die before I go back to the Gowds, Dan."

Dan got up and studied her for several moments.

"I am alone, too," he told her. "Everybody should have someone, Lina. We're two against the world. Maybe I'm not a bargain, but I figure I'm as good as the average man. If we get out of these parts, I'm goin' to ask you to marry me. Because I love you, Lina."

She knew she wanted to hear him say that. A delicious warmth fanned out from her heart and there was music in the night, but she could not answer him then. Dan Springer's life was not worth much at the moment. There would be a few hours of happiness left, and then it would be snatched away from her again.

"It's been such a short time, Dan," she said, and turned away from him. "I'll need a little more."

"All right, forget it, Lina."

He went to the black and took blankets

from the saddle, walked to the shelter of the pines and made a place for her to sleep. She followed after him slowly, close to tears. "I won't be far away," he said. "We have to start early in the morning. Get all the rest you can."

"Dan," she said, when she was tucked in under the blankets, "it is because I'm still afraid. Give me just a little more time."

"Not much left, Lina."

He walked away into the dark, and she closed her eyes and was almost immediately asleep. . . .

A SHAFT of warm sunlight came down through the high branches hours later and awakened her. She sat up quickly, looked around, and called to Dan. She could see no sign of either horse or rider, and panic seized her. She got to her feet.

"Dan!" she called hoarsely, and the silence put an eerie hollow timbre in her voice.

She stood there as if made of stone, everything inside of her twisted into a knot. She walked back to where she had slept, to get her hat, and then she found a note scrawled on the back of a postcard, stuck into the rawhide band. It said:

Wait for me. We have need of another horse. There are cold biscuits and bacon under your hat.

She sat down on the pine needles and waited, a cold fear eating through her. She had not waited long when she heard the sound of a horse and rider crashing through the undergrowth. Dan called to her, and she was quickly up and running. He broke into sight on the black. Behind him ran a mouse-colored bronc, sides soaped with its sweat. Springer's face was gray in the early morning light.

"Ran into trouble, Lina," he said. "Quick, get on this horse! No time to talk. They're boxin' us in!" His head seemed too heavy for his neck, and once it fell limply forward. "Follow me, Lina."

"Dan, you're hit!" she cried, as they rode swiftly along the rim.

"Not bad. I can make it a long way, Lina."

He reloaded his six-gun, the Colt tucked in the crook of his left arm, and hastily fumbled in the cartridges. The rough trail wriggled downward and strung out across the flats, and Dan swung in a wide half-circle toward the west. The black set a blistering pace and the mouse-colored horse hung doggedly at his heels.

"They'll never think we'd cut back, Lina!" he called over his shoulder. "They'll be waiting at the wrong place to cut us off."

Fifteen minutes later, they rode through the timber where they had made the cold camp and came out onto a long bench where cattle grazed. Dan Springer had a memory for landmarks, and so found the arroyo that snaked through a mass of low rocky hills. Deep into the rough country, he pulled the black to a stop and swiftly considered the next move.

"Dan," Lina said, her hat flung back and her hair tumbled, "there's a little stream of water here. Let me wash out that bullet wound for you."

"No time," he said. "Gowd was smarter than I figured. Just saw the head and shoulders of a man up there in the brush. Lina, ride into the willows there, and make no sound. They haven't seen us yet but they're blocking the way out!"

CHAPTER V

New Life—New Love

SPRINGER slipped out of the saddle, led his horse to the bank of the dried-up watercourse and hitched it to a windfall. He started walking up the arroyo, his steps as soft as a stalking cougar's. His Colt was in his hand.

Lina leaned against the mouse-colored bronc, fighting her terror. Her fingers were curled around the stock of a rifle in the saddle-boot for several moments before she realized it was there.

Suddenly she was afraid no longer. She was going to have something to say about the business of insuring happiness this time. All that mattered now in her life was walking up there to break a clear path to the future. So she took the rifle out of the boot, and followed as quickly as caution would allow.

She came out into a small bowl-like depression in the hills and saw Dan Springer and another man facing each other not more than twenty yards apart. Lina almost screamed. The man was Frank Gowd. He stood loose in his clothes, hands hanging limply at his sides. All the hate that could possibly be in a man was in Gowd's eyes.

"Thought you might work back this way, Springer!" he snarled. "Just you and me, blast your heart! You washed me plumb out last night, and you won't never leave here alive. Tell me, Springer, what you're fightin' me for?"

"Because of a couple of men, Gowd," Dan said grimly. "They were drinkin' men. My father and my brother. Up north, you made bootleg whisky once before, and didn't care much what you put in it when grain or corn was hard to get. You had a cabin in a place called Friel's Gap. One night Pa and my brother Bill got liquor from you. The next day they were dead. Before Bill died, he told me you sold it to 'em, Gowd! That answer your question? Think you'll go out of here alive yourself?"

Gowd grinned. "I think so, Springer. All right, Drago!"

As Lina saw a man's head appear above a big boulder to the right of and behind Gowd, she knew that Dan had no time in which to shift his position to deal with this killer of Gowd's. She raised the Winchester and squeezed the trigger. The man behind the boulder threw up his hands and fell back out of sight.

Frank Gowd fired blindly in the direction from which the shot had come, but the bullet sang wide of Lina. Dan swung his head toward her, his six-gun held ready when he grinned, and swung toward Gowd.

"Forgot the girl, didn't you, Gowd?" he yelled. "Watch for more bushwhackers, Lina! I got business to finish with this skunk!"

Frank Gowd looked smaller without a rifleman to back him up. His eyes roved swiftly in the hopes that more of his men were within sound of his voice. He screamed names that were strange to the girl, before he made his play.

"I'm in a hurry!" Springer snapped, and took several quick steps toward Gowd. "I'm givin' you the chance you never gave my flesh and blood, you scum! I'm coming at you shootin', Gowd!"

Frank Gowd fired and his first shot was wild and hurried. Dan's aim was true, and a bullet tore through Gowd's thigh and knocked him to a sitting position.

"Get up, Gowd!" the puncher said icily. "You get all the chances comin' to you."

Sweat poured down the moonshiner's bony face as he lifted himself off the ground. He turned slowly and faced Springer, his six-gun leveled. Dan's second bullet slammed into his chest and drove him back on his heels. Gowd fired into the ground before all the nerves in his gunhand died, when Dan Springer put his third bullet right between the moonshiner's eyes.

Lina took her hands away from her face and saw Gowd sprawled out. She ran quickly toward Springer.

"Thanks, honey," he said, and grinned. "Come on—we got the rest of the scum to beat. Let's hurry for the horses."

In their saddles again, they rode up the bank of the arroyo and broke out of a stretch of new growth where a fire had once raged and topped a bald hill that looked down on the scattered buildings of a cattle ranch. The tawny flats were on all sides of them as they picked up a rutted wagon road and followed its course to a corduroy bridge spanning a brawling stream.

Here Springer saw the shapes of riders limned against the crest of a hogback off to the right. He swung his head toward Lina.

"We can outdistance them in an hour," he said. "Get all you can out of the horse. I think we can make it over the pass and into the pot-holes. If we can, they'll never catch us."

SHE heard the crack of a Winchester, saw the riders coming down the far slope.

"They're way short!" Springer assured her, and tried to turn his grimace of pain into a grin.

He gave some steel to the black and it lengthened its stride. But Lina knew they would nearly have to ride the heart out of both broncs if they wanted to preserve the precious new life they had both discovered.

It was a race now. They pounded past a drunken sign marking a cross-road, and Springer swung off the road and took his chances with the heavy timber that began where a rolling meadow ended. Lina knew he was hurt bad. At times, he lowered his head as if it had become too heavy to carry on his shoulders. Then he would lift it with great effort.

She twisted in the saddle before they drove into the woodland, and fired shots from the Winchester. The men behind them seemed to have narrowed the gap a little.

She knew Springer needed everything to keep him going. She reined in close, halfway through the timber.

"I have my answer, Dan," she said. "I'll

follow you forever, no matter where you go. I love you, and always will no matter what happens."

Her words had the power to straighten him in the saddle, and he grinned at her, his eyes showing the promise of all the good things ahead.

And now she was sure they would have them all.

Beyond the screen of the woods, the horses put on a fresh burst of speed, and down below, swimming in the purple haze, was the wild country that offered them haven. They picked up a path which had been pounded out of the short growth by the hoofs of thousands of cattle, and it followed along a high ridge for miles. Then dropped down into a narrow canyon.

Lina looked back before they made the steep descent, drew the rifle out of its boot. Three horsemen swung around a bend in the trail not two hundred yards behind them, and she threw three shots at them.

She had the wild blood in her now, was taking a hand in shaping the course of the life only begun. A man fell out of his saddle, and a sorrel horse went up in a screaming wild pesado and unseated another man. The third pursuer twisted his bronc around and got quickly out of sight.

"Go on ahead, Dan!" Lina cried and laughed. "I'll keep them mighty discouraged."

She kept turning and firing, although there was no more sign of pursuit. At last she thrust the empty Winchester in its boot and followed Dan Springer down into the canyon. Deep in its fastness they found a natural cave scooped out of the rocky wall, big enough to accommodate both themselves and the tired horses.

Dan had to be helped to the ground. He grinned at Lina as she kissed him, then he closed his eyes and slipped away from her for a while.

The night moved in and there was no disturbing sound anywhere around, only the nerve-soothing song of myriad nocturnal creatures. Lina washed out the wound in Dan's side again, made a crude poultice of herbs she had gathered, and pressed it against the torn flesh.

Dan stirred, mumbled, then opened his eyes. A match flared and he saw Lina's face.

"Yeah, it is true," he said in a whisper. "A man goes to heaven when he dies. Most men." Fragments of the events of the last few days ran through his mind. "Mighty big things you did, Lina, for a girl who was afraid to look life in the eye. But for you, Gowd would have had the last of the Springers."

"I found some cold bacon in your saddlebag," the girl said. "Just enough coffee to warm your blood, Dan. I'll make a fire. Just shut your eyes again for a while and rest."

She took Springer's six-gun and cartridges from his belt, and filled the cylinder. The gun was within easy reach of her hand as she built a fire.

She kept listening for dangerous sounds and knew that any man who dared walk into view would surely die.

SHE thought back as she filled the coffee pot with water from a small spring, to the things she had wanted to forget. All those things she had loved were just as dear to her now, and recalling them gave her pleasure instead of pain.

A few minutes later, assured that there was no longer anything to fear, she took an old tin cup of hot coffee to the man who had taught her how to love and cherish the good things that were at hand, and to remember those that were now part of the past. . . .

Two days later, Dan Springer's ruddy color was back in his cheeks and he was ready to ride again.

"We'll put a lot of miles behind us before sundown," he said. "By that time we should have come to a town, Lina. There is a preacher in most towns. Then we'll ride another day or two and decide where we want to begin livin'."

"I began to live the day you rode into Gowd's place," Lina said. "There was only one thing didn't come true. You had a black horse instead of a white one, Dan."

"Huh?" he said, and took her in his arms. "I started out on a white one, dear. It stepped into a woodchuck hole and broke its leg. So just about everythin' come true."

They were riding south at noon with the sun high and warm in the sky, and an hour before dusk reached a butte's grassy rim and looked down on a strange town. There was a steeple rising high out of the cluster of sun-baked roofs, with a cross on it.

Lina leaned out of the saddle, and Dan held her close to him.

They knew life would really be beginning for them now.

Math sprang at Chat Ato and his six-shooter slapped against the side of the Navajo's head

HOGAN FURY

By CLEE WOODS

Math Keller, New Mexico trading post keeper, trails the killers of his brother in his own plumb original manner!

THE instant he stepped through the front door of his Navajo trading post, Math Keller knew something was wrong. Just the sliding door of the tobacco case left open. A box of ammunition standing on the counter. A used leather glove on the floor. Several cheap watches gone. Neither Math nor his kid brother, Eddie, ever left things in disorder.

It was a typical remote trading post on the Navajo Indian Reservation in New Mexico. Thick walls of stone. High windows. Rough board floor. Counters worn slick by two generations of sitting Navajos. Country store goods with the added items Navajos buy—bright Pendleton blankets, gay scarfs, and combs sparkling with rhinestones.

Math's gaze went to the pawn cage, that wire enclosure where they kept the pawned turquoise beads and necklaces,

the silver bracelets and rings. The Navajo pawns a squash blossom necklace or a heavy old hand-wrought bracelet set with turquoise, as freely as a white man withdraws from his savings account.

A glance inside the pawn cage told Math that the cage had been looted. The cash drawer was empty. The cigarettes all gone.

"Hey, Eddie!" Math called.

Eddie had been left in charge of the trading post while Math had been at Albuquerque to see the Bureau of Indian Affairs about renewal of his lease. Eddie would have been sleeping alone in the store. Now there came no answer from him.

"Hey, Eddie!" Math called, in greater anxiety.

He hurried through the back door of the store, making for their living quarters in the rear. Just two rooms for brothers, batching it.

Math jerked to a halt. There lay Eddie on the floor. A dark pool had oozed out from his head. A new hammer had been dropped onto the floor near him, after it had crushed the skull.

A strange sickness came into Math's breast and spread all through him. Eddie gone like this! The younger brother whom he had brought up almost by himself. Eddie, who just about worshiped Math.

Math dropped onto a box, all at once weak in the legs. Nothing ever had hit him like this. And nothing else ever would.

Slowly there came to Math one dreadful certainty. He was going to catch and punish Eddie's murderer. Just now the burden of that rested solely upon Math's shoulders. The Reservation Navajos appointed to police duty too often sided with their own people when there was a clash between white and Navajos. And since there was no telephone here, it would be hours before the white sheriff could be brought to the spot.

TO MATH the murder was the work of Navajos, clearly. The great majority of Navajos are good people, law-abiding. But occasionally one goes to the bad. Somewhere on the big Reservation a trader's store was robbed almost every year. Sometimes a trader got killed.

Now it was Math Keller against unknown Navajos.

Math was a slim, red-headed young man with large blue eyes. The Navajos called him "Chee," their word for red.

Math examined the living quarters. Not a thing had been disturbed. The back door had been unbolted from the inside, then closed, but not locked.

Math went to Big Begay's hogan some three hundred yards away. Big Begay had a small herd of sheep, and he worked for Math occasionally. Math was sure that Big Begay had not had anything to do with Eddie's murder.

It was only half an hour after daylight, for Math had hurried home from the night train at Gallup. Today Navajos would be bringing in their lambs to sell.

Born a trader's son, Math spoke Navajo fluently.

"Did you hear any noise from the store last night?" he asked the dark-skinned Big Begay in Navajo.

"No," said the Indian.

"See any strangers around yesterday or last night?"

"No," Big Begay again answered in blunt Navajo fashion, though friendly as usual.

"Well, Eddie was killed in the store," Math said. "Get on your horse and ride hard for the agency at Tohatchi. Tell them to telephone for the sheriff and get him out here in a hurry."

Big Begay shot his black eyes toward the trading post. Death! Almost all Navajos have a horror of the dead. So much so that most will not even bury their dead if they can get some white trader or Government man to do it.

At Math's words, Big Begay's squaw and children grew very quiet in the hogan. Math had heard them at their breakfast when he had come up. He stepped to the old red-and-white blanket which served as a shutter for the one door, and called to Big Begay's wife:

"Send a boy after Tom Whitehill and tell Tom to take charge of—of Eddie and everything till I can get back."

Math returned to the trading post, thinking as he went. He would have to hurry. Tracks on the dry range age rapidly. But he first must see what telltale sign the guilty ones had left.

There wasn't much. The main evidence

he would have was in the loot they had taken. Cash. Turquoise and silver jewelry. Cigarettes. Two or three pairs of boots. A dozen silk scarfs. Three cheap watches. Two rifles and ammunition. And a beautiful Yei-bi-chi blanket of the Two-Gray-Hills weave, priced for tourists at three hundred dollars.

They had left several pairs of boots on the counter, where they had tried on boots until they got footgear to fit. Cigarette butts lay on the floor which Eddie had swept clean after closing. The robbers had taken their time. That meant they were young men who had been away to school and did not have the Navajo fear of death, or they had not believed Eddie was dead.

Math kept two horses, chiefly for trips over the almost roadless sections of the Chuska Mountains in the routine of collections and contracting for sheep and wool. He saddled a big red sorrel, tied a pair of blankets on behind his cantle. Then he got a heavy, three-cell flashlight and half a dozen extra batteries. Might have to do some night trailing. Finally, he buckled on a six-shooter and swung up.

Just as he was leaving, Big Begay rode by on his way to the Tohatchi agency. Indian fashion, he had not volunteered information beyond the questions Math asked, but now he was ready to give a bit of information Math might use.

"There was a strange dog around last night," he said in Navajo.

"What did it look like?"

"Black, and large."

"Long or short-haired?"

"I did not see it that well. It was dark. My dogs drove it off."

"What time?"

"The moon was there." Big Begay indicated the position of the sun at about ten o'clock.

Math looked at the waning moon hanging pale in the west in daylight. That would set the visit of the robbers well before midnight. They would have had a start of nine or ten hours, but a trail sign stays pretty warm that long when there is no wind.

FROM the store, horses' tracks headed west, as if making for the mountains. Across a sandy stretch Math saw that they'd had four mounts, three ridden and one led. The tracks of a large dog accompanied the horse tracks.

Some two miles from the store the fugitives had taken to a trail which led to a Navajo dirt tank. A Navajo woman had driven her three hundred sheep out over the trail only half an hour ahead of Math, taking the sheep to pasture as she would do every day in the year soon after daylight. That obliterated the horse tracks.

Math lost half an hour picking up that trail, and when he did find it the trail was swerving north. In another hour it was turning east. Pretty wary devils. Doing all they could to throw off pursuit. They had now wrapped the hoofs of their horses in pieces of green sheepskin, to leave only light imprints as if made by balls.

But the regularity of these imprints kept up across sandy land that had been eaten almost bare of grass by the ever-growing Navajo flocks. And the dog always trotted along. The killers were definitely headed out into the great wasteland of the Navajo Reservation, where a thousand hills looked the same to the untrained eye.

Math found another effort to throw off trailers. Directly over their trail they had placed two deposits of horse dung about thirty-six hours old—a ruse of the wily Apache Indians in Geronimo's day, to make trailers believe the trail was old. But the dog tracks had not been doctored, and the ball-like imprints were still the same freshness.

It was early October, and fall was in the air. By noon the wind began to stir, as October winds often do on the rolling desert country six thousand feet above sea level. The tracks began to fade fast as the wind sifted dry dust and sand across the trail.

By mid-afternoon all sign was gone, and Math could do nothing but hold on in the general direction the fugitives had taken. All this way they had been careful not to ride near the occasional Navajo hogans tucked away here and there in coves and canyons. That gave Math no help from inquiry of the local Indians.

The wind grew stronger for half an hour, until it was carrying sand, and whirlwinds played far and near. Then the wind died down and Math paused to take stock.

The men he was trailing definitely were holding eastward. Sooner or later he would find someone who had seen them, or run onto them in camp.

One thing was pretty sure—they would go up through the shallow canyon running from east to west and opening out only a couple of miles ahead. Math rode for it.

Then he found the wind had done him a good turn for the bad it had done. In the canyon, where they would be out of sight from open country, the three men had built a fire and cooked. Maybe taken a nap. Doubtless they had felt pretty safe by this time, with the wind sure to cover their sign.

But one of the trio had made a serious mistake. The wind had dug hard at some loosened sand, and Math caught sight of a bare half of a sawtooth spur. He took hold of it and pulled out an old boot and spur. Then the mate to the worn glove he had found in the trading post. Next, an old scarf.

One of the store robbers had buried his old duds here and donned the new. If he had only put a stone over the buried clothing he would have been better off. Now Math had something pretty convincing, once he found the man to whom those things belonged.

Math had something else. This fellow had been pretty anxious to get on his new clothes. Why? Caution should have made a man refrain from use of hot goods. Some urge was upon this Navajo.

Knowing these people, Math made a quick guess. A squaw dance. This was the time of year for squaw dances on the Reservation, and the young bucks will leave work, family and everything else to go and spend a happy night or two dancing with the eligible maidens.

Math made up his mind to inquire for the nearest squaw dance. That was his best bet, with no further sign to follow.

At a hogan he learned that there was to be a squaw dance tonight, given by Chis Benully, northeast some ten miles. Math knew the place; had bought sheep from old Chis. He determined to get to the dance about nine o'clock, when the fun would just be getting good.

It was on a wild spot of the Reservation, where the most primitive customs prevailed. Here Navajos seldom got as far as fifty miles from home. . . .

In the night shadows Math heard a knot of young men begin their weird, high-pitched singing. The girls came up shyly and sat down. They wore rich velvet blouses, richer jewelry and brilliant, wide skirts that swept the ground. Hair parted and sleeked back and sparkling with rhinestone combs and new yarn.

A pile of dry juniper and cedar ten feet high was lighted, and the flames leaped happily into the snappy air. About the fire were several hundred Navajos—whole families come for the fun. And young fellows from afar, seeking brides outside their own clans.

There were covered wagons alongside Ford pickups. Squaws in gay shawls sat astride their best horses, some with two or three hundred dollars' worth of silver work on cheek straps and browbands of their bridles.

Demurely, a seventeen-year-old girl steals out from the group on the ground. She searches through the young men standing about, and flits her black eyes again and again on the young bucks lined up on their horses. All dressed as American cowboys save that they wear bigger hats, gayer shirts—and often beads and bracelets!

The girl finds her young man. Her hand grasps his clothes and she tugs him toward the cleared circle near the fire. He grins and pretends he doesn't want to go. She tugs again. He lets himself be led into the circle. She takes hold of his arm, and they begin to dance around and around.

Another girl is having to drag her young buck in. The crowd laughs. A third is bringing an older man, who comes willingly. More and more girls lead their partners into the firelight, and the male chorus begins to sway back and forth in the high fervor of their song.

It was a splendid place for murderers to hide. So they thought. And enjoy the fruits of their robbery.

Math edged further and further back as the fire brightened the landscape. He wanted to seem casually interested, as a white man. A few of the Indians knew him, but this was too far from home for many to recognize him.

But mischievous Navajo maidens have an eye both for fun and profit. Just when

he was watching a dog fight off to one side, a Navajo girl tugged at his hip. It was bad manners not to dance when chosen.

Math lingered only long enough to note that three curs had jumped on a big black dog. Yelping its defeat, the black animal ran into the firelight and took refuge near a young man who was dancing away in high good fun.

Math did not know this Navajo. He was lean and tall. Fair enough of skin to be marked as a half-breed, and good-looking. He almost stepped on the black dog in his dancing, and broke his step enough to kick the poor creature. Yelping again, the poor animal took refuge under a wagon beyond the ring, only to be run off by another dog.

Math slid off his horse and let the girl lead him out onto the dance ground. She didn't say a word to him, wouldn't all through the dance. Her head hung in shyness, but she was grinning her triumph. It was something to catch a handsome white man who looked as though he had money.

By slight inclination in his walk, Math succeeded in having her stop for the dance close by the tall, handsome half-breed who had kicked the dog. The fellow gave Math one close glance in his turning, but seemed to have no suspicion of him. He didn't know who Math was.

When this Navajo's back was turned, Math glanced at his boots. They were good boots, probably Justins, but not from Math's trading post. Math was disappointed.

Around and around he danced, but all the time he was watching the Navajo dancers. His men were here. He had only to identify them.

A new pair of boots! On a medium-built young Navajo who had a distinct limp. He was smoking a tailor-made cigarette, too, although that was by no means a give-away because many of them were able to afford such smokes.

Math saw a second pair of new boots on a lanky, homely Navajo with one drooping eye. This one, too, had a new red scarf about his neck, which might well have come from Math's shelves.

The tall, light-complexioned dog kicker was finishing his dance. Now he was paying off. Every dancer must pay the girl at the end of the dance, according to his means. A dime might satisfy the girl with a poor Navajo boy, but Math would be expected to pay more. Math watched the dog-kicker's pay-off closely.

Just a quarter. That wasn't uncommon, and certainly not incriminating.

MATH paid his coy partner a silver dollar, and let the handsome half-breed see it. Then he retired to the sidelines. Not for long, though. Another girl had him. They would keep it up now, as long as he stayed in reach. Dollar pay-offs were not to be neglected.

Math kept watch on the three men he had spotted. The dandy fellow paid off in many nickels and dimes. He took pains to have Math see the money, too.

That constituted a silent challenge. The Navajo was not going to be outdone. He was a lady's man. He would no more than get free of one girl when another nabbed him, not to miss out on the gravy. And he was a happy Navajo.

Math was near him when little Mary Zospah came back with him for his third dance with her. A courtship was abloom. Mary's coy smiles. His pleased grins.

He paid her two dollars when he was through with the dance. When she showed the money to her mother and interested girls, there were many feminine looks flashed his way, all to his liking.

Math paid his partner three silver dollars. That was something unheard of, three pesos for one dance. The tall dandy was frowning when he saw the girl get so much money.

Math deliberately walked near Mary Zospah. She could not resist grabbing him for that fat pay-off. Math danced with her for twenty minutes, when five should have been enough. The dandy was getting more angry every minute. Math thought once he was going to interfere violently.

Cute little Mary was growing anxious, too. She wanted to be back with the handsome half-breed, but it is the man's privilege to dance as long as he wishes with a girl, and Math just glowered the dandy back and danced on.

When the fellow was coming near again, Math played his trump card. The half-breed's throwing cash away freely on the girls suggested it had come too easy, yet that was not directly incriminating. Math

wanted hard and fast proof. He therefore quit dancing and paid off, this time with an expensive turquoise ring from his finger. The girl tried to hide the gift from the half-breed, but he had seen—thanks to Math's intent.

Mary hurried to choose the dandy for her next partner. This time he danced with her longer than Math had, with exulting looks Math's way every so often. Math pretended not to notice him. But he was dancing steadily now, with first one girl and then another. He gave away two more rings, then large pieces of polished turquoise he had brought back from a wholesaler's in Albuquerque.

His spendthrift spree brought quick results. The limping swain and the lanky, homely one also paid off in rings and bracelets. It was getting hotter.

The dandy responded, true to his nature. With the girls he was a fast worker. Math watched anxiously. Everybody was watching, for this thing had gone beyond all former experience of the Navajos in the matter of pay-off to the girls.

A bracelet! Mary, grinning her delight, retired to her mother and showed her gift. Such a present was almost an outright bid for marriage. Math moved nearer, saw the bracelet close up. It was one from his trading post. The work of Ah-yay-hee, his best silversmith, it was of heavy hammered silver, set with blue turquoise which was laced richly with fine matrix lines.

Eventually, Math danced a second time with the girl on whom the dandy now was showering gifts. When he caught the lady killer glaring at him, their eyes met. The Navajo suspected his thoughts, was suddenly afraid.

Hastily Math pretended interest in Mary. That was a still greater error. The Navajo hated him for attention to Mary. He had become smitten with her rather suddenly.

Math had the men cornered. Now he must get an officer here, and with the officer catch the three men with more of the goods on them. But he waited, giving them time to bestow more gifts of jewelry. They might throw away their loot and disclaim ownership, but they established definite proof against themselves when they gave away jewelry that could be identified.

Math worked quietly for an hour, getting the names of the girls to whom jewelry was given more and more freely. He also learned the names of the three men, as given to other Navajos.

Math kept at all this a little too long. Henry Grayson, the handsome half-breed, was glaring at him as they passed each other. Math retired to the shadows and sought out some Navajo whom he could trust with a message. He could do no better than Many Beads, a shrewd old fellow.

"I'll give you twenty-five dollars to get the sheriff out here fast," Math offered. "Ride to Tohatchi. I've sent word to him to come there, and you bring him on here —fast."

"Luh—all right." Many Beads accepted the task.

SWIFTLY Math went back to watch his men. And found them gone! They had suddenly vanished. The black dog was still there, however, not having missed his master yet. Math went up to the dog, speaking to it kindly in Navajo, and the poor creature was glad for a good word. Math took a rope from his saddle and tied the dog off by itself.

Then he made a second search of the camp. His three men simply had faded away, and he could find no Navajo who would tell him one word of their going. It was no use trying to trail them tonight. Too many horses had come and gone over the ground.

But he had that mistreated dog. It was making up to Math, but he thought it still would be faithful to its brutal master. He got his horse and led the dog still further from camp, then began riding around the camp in a circle.

He had not gone a thousand yards before the black dog suddenly sniffed the ground and began tugging at the rope. He had found the trail of his fleeing master. Math got down with matches. Yes. The same four horses.

Math let the dog hold to that trail, but still at the end of the rope. He was sure that he was not half an hour behind the trio. They would make camp, he imagined, off where they felt safe again.

But they kept going all night. Scared murderers. Afraid of a white man on their trail.

At daylight he saw that the three men

once more were heading eastward. Cutting north of the Standing Rock trading post and making for the primitive regions of the great Reservation. They must be pretty thoroughly frightened.

All day Math followed the fugitives, chiefly by the aid of the black dog. He started calling the dog "Pitchy" because of his pitch-black color, and the dog responded by licking his hand—so glad for kindness.

Dusk was thickening over the vast mysterious Reservation when Math finally caught up with the men. They had avoided every hogan on their course, but now they were hungry and out of food. They had ridden into a hogan tucked away in a rock-encrusted cove where there was a dirt tank for watering their dinked mounts.

Math saw the horses as his head topped the rise. He dropped back, tied his horse and the black dog to a scrub cedar, and stole down upon the hogan afoot. The dog whined for him. All Math's dog now.

They had one man out as a sentinel, but he squatted by the door, with his back to the wall. Math came in from behind. Suddenly, he stepped out, gun on the guard.

"Not a sound!" he whispered in Navajo.

Math was taking a bold step. It was he alone, against the three killers. Probably the owners of the hogan also would side with the trio.

He saw in the man's face a thought to yell for help. Fortunately for Math, from the inside came the talk of the half-breed, Henry Grayson. Math wanted to take those inside by complete surprise, and he had only seconds in which to decide how he would do it.

He sprang at the guard, who called himself Chat Ato. The Navajo was coming to his feet as Math lunged. A new rifle from Math's trading post stood against the wall at his left shoulder. Chat Ato was grabbing for it. A cry broke from his lips.

Math's six-shooter slapped against the side of the Navajo's head, knocking him cold. Math never paused, knowing this Chat Ato would be out for several minutes. He leaped to the door of the hogan.

But the crude old wooden door was bolted from the inside. Math heard hasty low words inside, then ominous quiet. They had heard and they were going to fight.

A savage pleasure leaped up inside Math. He would welcome a showdown battle. The blood of his kid brother called for his own personal punishment of the killers. Yet Math knew better. The Government was strict in its dealings with white men on the Reservation. No white man ever would be given the right to take the law into his own hands, except in self-defense. But the law did permit any man to stop killers before they could escape.

"Listen, Grayson," Math called in Navajo, "you better come out and give up. I've got the proof on you three."

"I don't know what you're talking about," Grayson answered.

So they meant to pretend innocence. Now rage hit Math. He knew they were guilty. He wanted to mete out their punishment here and now.

He drew back and kicked the door with all his might. The door was made of heavy two-inch plank and didn't yield a bit. No use trying that any more. Math decided he better make sure of Chat Ato anyway. He took out rawhide and lashed it about the unconscious Navajo's wrists and ankles.

DARKNESS was deepening. Math let it settle down heavier and heavier over that besieged hogan. They wouldn't risk making a light, even if they had an old kerosene lamp. Math knew how the Navajo dreads an enemy in the darkness.

He knew also many Navajo superstitions. One dread is that if any enemy gains possession of even just a lock of hair he may work untold mischief upon the man who grew the hair, and upon those close to this man.

Math stepped over to Chat Ato and shook him. The Navajo stirred. Math shook him into full consciousness. Chat Ato wore his hair long. It was tied in a thick knot at the back of his head, with new pink yarn. Math took out his knife and began cutting off the Navajo's entire "chongo."

"No, no, man!" Chat Ato pleaded. "Don't do that to me!"

"What's he doing to you, Chat?" came Henry Grayson's call from inside.

"Cutting off my hair—all of it."

"And that's not all," Math put in. "I'm going to use it to work terrible harm upon

every one of you."

"Oh, no, don't take my hair!" Chat Ato cried.

Chat Ato writhed and twisted, trying to stop Math. But Math kept right on until he had the whole black wad cut loose from the head.

"Now," he cried, "I'll fetch the *tschindis* down on every one of you!"

The *tschindis* or Navajo devils are dreaded things. According to Navajo belief, they inhabit the very air, and fall upon any luckless ones not protected by the proper good luck charms and prayers. Or strike any person who falls under a curse.

Math's cry brought no immediate result. But he knew what dread his threat must be bringing to the two fugitives inside. Also to the family who belonged here and now were more or less innocent bystanders.

Math thrust a gag into Chat Ato's mouth and tied it fast. Then he took a log of wood from the woodyard and leaned it up against the dome-shaped hogan for a ladder when he was ready. But it wasn't quite dark enough yet. He waited.

The deep silence and the blackening night would fill the cornered Navajos with still more fear of him and the curse of the captured hair. He couldn't hear any sounds from the inside, but the hogan had solid rock walls ten inches or more thick. Math had his flashlight but he would wait for the right time to use it.

Chat Ato occasionally struggled on the ground, and sometimes he tried to shout through his gag. All this was to Math's liking. To give a still more dreaded touch, Math occasionally beat his hands on the side of the hogan with rhythmic slowness.

When Math thought it was dark enough, he put flashlight into breeches waistband and crawled up the side of the hogan, with the aid of the log. To conceal what he was doing, he beat on the hogan roof with one hand as he crawled. When he was nearly on top, he stopped the beating and lay still for at least ten minutes.

The smoke hole was within reach of his hand. This was a vent in the top plenty large to admit his body. Silently, Math placed a foot against the end of the log and kicked the log outward. It fell in the yard with a crash. With that to divert attention and cover what little sound he made, Math suddenly lifted himself to the smoke hole and dropped down into the inky blackness inside the hogan.

A child screamed, and a cry of terror broke from the woman.

It wasn't more than nine feet from hole to dirt floor. As his feet hit the floor, Math sprang to one side lightly. The child's scream smothered all sound he made and no human eye could see six inches ahead in such a Stygian pit. The pungent Navajo smell filled his nostrils. A big dog let out a vicious growl at the other side of the room.

A hand smothered the frightened child's mouth. One hasty word from its master stopped the dog's snarls. A fearful silence fell over the hogan. There he was, only feet away from men who now would kill him even more ruthlessly than they had his brother. They had killed Eddie merely to rob, but now Math knew they would kill him to save their own hides.

Math didn't know where the two murderers were in the room. He felt he could just about place the woman and her several children on the left side, far back. He made a shrewd guess that Grayson and his droop-eyed partner had stayed near the door, so they might guard it and also be ready to run if running time came.

That terrible silence. The pitchy blackness. Death so close at hand he almost could feel it. And through all this Math was straining his ears for something.

THERE! The tick of a cheap watch. The loot from a showcase was telling Math within inches of where one of his enemies stood. Not far from the door, on the south side.

Math tried to hear another watch. They had taken three. When no other ticking betrayed the presence of the second man, Math took two noiseless steps toward the door.

The instant he moved, the family dog growled deeply and panted with angry breath. Math was sure, though, that somebody was holding the dog for the moment, anyway. Far deeper was Math's fear that the two killers would fight him with knives, once he closed with them. Knives also had been missing from the showcases, and for ages Indians have been good at slashing into their enemies with wicked blades.

Now he caught the tick of the second

watch. It was even nearer the door than the first. Math thought that when the two men did move, it would be in a break out the door. They were not the kind to relish a hand-to-hand battle here in such close, pitch-black quarters.

And in the last ten seconds Math had made up his mind to do something. He believed that the State of New Mexico would sentence these men to death for such a brutal killing. But if he himself killed the Navajos, he would be the one to go on trial. Better risk a little more to capture them and turn them over to the law.

But he wanted the two killers to think that he was here to spill out their blood on this hard dirt floor. Dread of death would drive such terror through them that they would not have much cunning left. But they would be wild, savage.

Slowly, Math took out his flashlight. He would give them a fine surprise when he whipped that light through the hogan. And he had better be ready to fight when the light showed his men to him.

But the break came before he was ready. He heard a man leap for the door and claw frantically for the latch. Math jabbed his flashlight up, intending to sweep the man into its full blaze. But before he could push the button, a body hit him hard from the side. That was the second man rushing for the door. He had crashed into Math either accidentally or intentionally.

Math's flashlight was knocked from his hand before he got it turned on. He felt a knife blade sting at his right ribs as he toppled sideward under the impact of the body. He heard the dog rushing across the floor for him.

Math lurched away from the man with the knife. The fellow shouted frantically at his partner. Math knew that it was hopeless for him to try to fight that knife blade in such darkness, and the dog would be upon him the next instant.

Math risked the whole battle on a downward whip of his body. Clear to the floor, his right hand sweeping out across the floor in search of the lost flashlight. He got it!

But the dog's teeth were sinking into his thigh. And the door flying open. That meant the two men were escaping.

[*Turn page*]

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It also meant something else. Through the door there lurched a black ball of fury—the black dog Math had left tied to a tree nearly an hour earlier. It had gnawed its rope loose and here it was rushing into the fight. And it took naturally to an enemy dog, the one sinking teeth into Math. The two creatures filled the hogan with the fury of their battle.

Math bounded to his feet and flicked his flashlight on. There was Grayson, just diving through the door. Math shot a foot out and tripped the half-breed. Grayson spilled headlong through the door.

Math sprang through the door after him and drove a foot unmercifully for the half-breed's ribs. Grayson was coming up nevertheless, and Math saw the knife blade flash. Math risked everything in a hard drive of his left fist for the half-breed's jaw, while his right hand spotted Grayson with the flashlight.

Math clipped that jaw square and hard. Grayson's head snapped back. His arms fell. The knife thudded to the ground.

Math whirled. There was the droop-eyed Navajo jabbing a rifle at him. Math cut off the flashlight and dived for the rifle muzzle as it came up. His hand slapped hard into the new blued steel and knocked the Winchester aside as it blazed. Then Math brought the flashlight crashing down across the Navajo's head.

That one desperate blow of the heavy flashlight was enough. The Navajo crumpled. The flashlight went out with the blow, and once more Math was in pitch-dark night.

But he had his three men on the ground, helpless. And out through the door came a yelping dog, thoroughly whipped. It was the dog that belonged here. The big black dog had done the job. The next moment Math felt the black dog's muzzle nudge his hand as if to ask, "How'm I doing, pard?" Math thought to himself, "Pitchy, we're pards from here on."

Math hastened to tie up Grayson and the droop-eyed man. While he was at it he assured the Navajo family that it was all over, and no harm was meant for them.

"They are bad men," the head of the family said. "I knew it. But how was I to help myself?"

"Don't worry, *hosteen*," Math told him. "I've got the three men I wanted—and Chat Ato's hair. I'll keep that hair, too, till I hear they're in the electric chair."

THE BUNKHOUSE

(Continued from page 8)

book contained names of such outstanding exterminators as William Clarke Quantrill. Frank and Jesse James, the Younger brothers and a lot of others who were always ready to deal any kind of a blow possible to the Federal forces!

Belle did not use her feminine wiles and her come-hither eyes merely for the destruction of her enemies. She almost wrecked the guerilla organization by causing most of it to fall in love with her, and then when she could have married most any of big-name outlaws of the gang, she fell in love with an obscure but fully capable young horse thief named Jim Reed.

The Stolen Bride

Belle and Reed were not married for some time afterward, however, as Judge Shirley threatened to use his old scatter shotgun on Reed, and as soon as the war was over he loaded his lovely daughter into a prairie schooner and carted her off to Texas, where he settled not far from the present city of Dallas.

But one bright, happy morning, the big bad boy from Missouri, accompanied by a supporting force of about a dozen boon companions, appeared at the Shirley home, overruled the Judge's double-barrelled objections, and stole Belle.

Jim Reed, after his marriage to Belle, which occurred the same day he stole her from her father's home, resumed his old tricks of stealing horses and it was not long before she was back home, while her husband was trying to beat a sheriff's posse to the Texas border.

She was placed in a boarding school in Parker County by her dad, and was virtually a prisoner until Jim Reed evaded his pursuers, and bringing an extra saddle horse with him, appeared unannounced at the boarding school, kicked in the door and again stole Belle.

Jim and Belle settled in the Indian Territory for a time, but Dad Shirley came one day when Jim was away and took Belle with him. This time he shipped her to her uncle's ranch in Colorado, but again Jim Reed found his wife and stole her back. About a year after Jim had brought his wife back from Colorado to Missouri, her daughter Pearl

was born, but when the baby was not more than three months old they had to start traveling again, for Jim had avenged the killing of his brother by a man named Shannon, by killing three of the Shannon men.

On the Move

They visited California, Utah, Oregon, and many points of the West. Having to keep on the move there were any number of robberies in their wake. Finally they came back to Texas, and Jim, gathering a couple or three companions, proceeded to indulge in a number of robberies, one of which was accomplished by partially hanging a man named Watt Grayson and his wife, and making them reveal the hiding place of $30,000 in gold coins.

Jim Reed was later killed by a detective who passed himself off as a horse thief. His killing occurred one day while the Reeds were having dinner with a friendly farmer and Jim had left his shooting irons off as a matter of courtesy.

Belle's Career of Crime

It was then, or directly after the killing of her husband, that Belle's real crime career began. As a widow Belle was an instantaneous success. She was good looking, she had a husky bank roll, and in addition she possessed a great asset, left her by her husband, in the form of a mailing list containing the names and addresses of all the best horse-thieves and highwaymen in Texas and the Indian Territory. Most of these men Belle could have sent to the pen or the gallows. They knew it and this made the recruiting of any kind of gang she wanted to command an easy matter.

She opened a livery and sales stable in Dallas, while her gang stole horses for her to sell. Finally a man bought a horse from her and then had to turn it over to the rightful owner. He was the only dissatisfied customer she had out of a long list, and when he came back and squawked, she promptly shot him and left him for his family to bury.

Once when she was arrested on an arson charge and lodged in jail, a wealthy man came to see her out of curiosity, fell in love with her, gave her a large sum of money and helped her get the case dismissed. Another time, when she was in jail for horse stealing, she vamped the sheriff and persuaded him to free her and elope with her, but as soon as they were across the border she sent him back to his wife.

Having buried her father, and parked her children with other relatives, as she was now the mother of a boy also, she decided that the

[*Turn page*]

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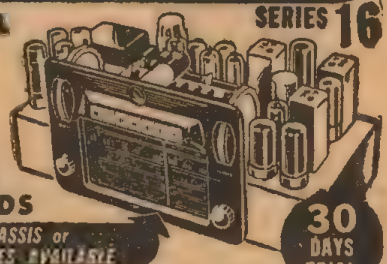
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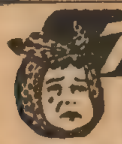

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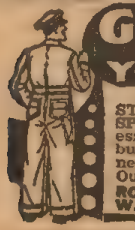

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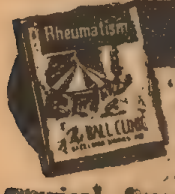

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Indian Territory was the place for a first class lady bandit to operate and we find her, about 1877, the head of a gang of outlaws as tough as any who ever held up a stage coach or robbed a bank.

In her gang were such potential gallows' birds as Jim French, Jack Spaniard, John Middleton, and "Blue Duck". Belle was the brains behind the gang. She seldom took part in the major robberies, but planned them and told her men where to go and what to do. They looted stores, stole stock, nabbed Indian payrolls and once in a while cleaned out a bank.

It is said, however, that she once single-handedly robbed the faro game in the Mint gambling house of Dodge City. She had given "Blue Duck" a week's vacation and $2,000 in cash for a spree in Dodge. He returned within a couple of days and said they had robbed him at the faro game in the Mint. Belle, with gun in hand, went into the crowded gambling house and held up the faro game, taking $7,500 and inviting the faro dealer out to her place to collect the difference between the two thousand he had taken from "Blue Duck" and the amount she was taking from him. The dealer never called.

Her Face Was Her Fortune

When Belle did take part in a robbery, it was usually a lone-handed job. She also knew that it was her face and figure, as much or more than her six-guns, that enabled her to control men and for that reason she would take long trips on which she would buy attractive clothing and make frequent visits to beauty doctors.

It was on one of these trips to Texas that she met a banker who promptly fell in love with her and was foolish enough to allow her to make a date with him in the bank after closing hours, where they could be all, all alone.

The banker got one kiss, and then felt the barrel of a forty-five pressing against his breast and heard the order to open the vault and put the money in a sack which Belle had brought concealed in her clothing. The banker put $30,000 in the sack, and was told that his life depended on his keeping quiet for the next few minutes. Belle backed out of the bank and was soon on her way back to the Indian Territory.

A short time later Belle acquired another husband, and what a husband! He was a half-breed Cherokee Indian named Sam Starr. He could neither read nor write, but he had served his apprenticeship in crime with her first husband Jim Reed, and as a member

of the Cherokee tribe he was entitled to a section of land in the newly opened "strip" and by marrying him Belle was also entitled to a section.

A Rendezvous for Bandit

Belle located a claim of more than a thousand acres, in a beautiful wilderness near the Canadian River, built a big log house which became the rendezvous of a good many nationally-known bandits, and she set them to work with the result that any kind of movable property within a large radius of the place was very insecure. It was but a few months until Belle and her husband found themselves on the way to the Federal prison in Detroit, where they were destined to do a year for horse stealing.

Sam was booked to do hard labor. But the warden took one glance at the attractive Belle and decided he needed an office assistant, and so the year in prison was not dull or monotonous for her.

When the prison term ended Belle went right back into the old game again. She did it with renewed vigor. Her old gang became livelier than ever. They committed crimes with clocklike regularity, and yet it was fully a year before the authorities were able to land another complaint on her doorstep and try to arrest her on it.

This time, as before, the charge was horse-stealing, but when the officers looking for evidence in the case started to break open one of Belle's trunks, she was sure that they were after evidence or clues in regard to the hitherto unexplained death of a couple of citizens, and she simply snatched out a couple of guns and chased the officers away. She then rode into Fort Smith and smilingly offered to stand trial on the horse-stealing charge, but was informed that there was no horse-stealing charge against her.

Once More A Widow

They had escaped the law so many times since their liberation from the Detroit prison that Sam became careless in his work of taking other people's property, and he was arrested for robbing a post-office. Of course, there was a little gun-play preceding the arrest, and also, as a matter of course, Sam was bailed out to await trial.

As a dutiful wife should have been, Belle was right there at Sam's side in the court, and a few hours later, in celebration of his temporary freedom perhaps, she went with him to a party where the men folks, including a couple of the officers who had arrested Sam, were lapping up quite a bit of liquor.

The inevitable happened, and when the

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gunsmoke finally cleared in the room it was immediately apparent that Belle was again a widow. Sam Starr was killed in November, 1886, and for a little more than two years thereafter Belle continued to operate, and prospered exceedingly, with but one charge filed against her. That charge she was able to beat in court.

The end came soon after a stranger named Arthur Watson moved into Belle's neighborhood. He was supposed to be wanted by the authorities in Florida for murder. Belle knew this and while she and he were having an argument over a lease on a part of her acreage, Watson said something to her about the frequent visits to her place of Federal officials, and she retorted that no doubt the Florida officers might like to know of his whereabouts.

Died With Her Boots On

It is said that this caused Watson to believe that Belle intended to turn him into the law. Anyway, a day or so later Belle Starr was shot in the back while riding along near the town of Eufaula. She died with her boots on as did her husbands, and while Watson was arrested and stood trial for the murder of Belle, the evidence was so flimsy that the case was dismissed.

She was buried on a hilltop of the Starr farm, and some say that her name, Belle Starr is engraved on the tombstone. Others say that instead of the name there is a bell on one side and a star on the other, but all agree that the tombstone has engraved upon it the following verse: "Shed not for me one bitter tear, Nor give the heart to vain regret, 'Tis but the casket that lies here, The gem that filled it sparkles yet."

That, my friends of the Bunkhouse, is the story of America's most notorious woman bandit. And now I'll be saying *Adios*.

—FOGHORN CLANCY.

OUR NEXT ISSUE

WHEN old Abe Thurman fences a part of Happy Valley that Ike Gordon owner of the big G Bar spread, figures should rightfully be his, guns begin to boom in that peace-loving community, setting off one of the bloodiest range wars in the old West.

To further complicate things, the sheriff is young Tom Gordon, son of the fiery old owner of the G Bar spread, while the judge in power is none other than Abe Thurman himself. And so Wyatt Earp, famed U.S. Deputy Marshal, is called in to stop the slaughter and settle things amicably. An ambusher's bullet

puts him temporarily out of action, however, and Earp then sends immediately for Captain Bob Pryor, known far and wide as the Rio Kid, and his Mexican saddlemate, Celestino Mireles, to act as deputies in his stead.

After several brushes with both embattled ranchers, neither of which takes kindly to the efforts of these outsiders to settle their feud, the Rio Kid and Sheriff Tom Gordon get a tip that the Thurmans are to pull off a big night raid on the G Bar Ranch. They hastily ride out to rouse Ike Gordon and his men, but find the raid already in progress. What happens after that is revealed in this stirring scene from GUNS OF HAPPY VALLEY, next issue's exciting complete novel by Lee E. Wells:

The Rio Kid snaked his six-guns from leather, let Saber have his head, and swept down the slope to give chase to the raiders. The dun, Saber, was a trained war horse, loving the sound of exploding guns, needing no directions in the swift swirl of battle.

Bullets cut the air around the Rio Kid. To his right a G Bar rider threw his arms high over his head and tumbled from the saddle. Another swayed suddenly, caught the saddle horn, hung on for a few yards, and then rolled limply out of sight.

As men jumped from the high grass and streaked toward a band of horses, the Rio Kid's sixes lined down and blasted, and Saber swung directly toward the fleeing men. Gunfire from the besieged ranch increased and men came out of the buildings, stopped momentarily to fire at the escaping enemy.

Saber bore down on a fleeing renegade. The man suddenly halted, turned, his Colt spitting lead at the tall figure in blue who bore down on him. Something tugged at the Rio Kid's sleeve. His guns spewed flame and the man fell limp as a sack. Saber thundered on, ears laid back, teeth bared.

It was over as quickly as it had started. Suddenly there were only G Bar men. Some streaked after the fleeing raiders, others turned to fight flames that ate hungrily through the grass toward the house. One barn was gone, but quick work saved the other buildings and the grass fire was soon halted.

"An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth," old Ike Gordon said in a deadly monotone. "It's an old law and I reckon there ain't no need to change it. The Thurmans will pay for this night's work and pay for it over and over again."

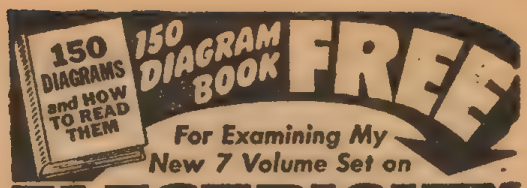
"Paw," Tom Gordon said slowly, "we know who did it. There ain't no doubt but who's guilty. Let the law handle it and bring them to justice. I'll arrest Bob Thurman and every manjack that was with him."

Ike looked up, scorn in every line of his face. "You arrest 'em! Yuh'd be so filled with lead yuh'd be hard to lift! G Bar can handle its own skunks and be beholden to no one."

"Yuh're raidin' yoreself," Tom accused.

"Yuh're blasted right I'm raidin'!" Ike faced his

[*Turn page*]



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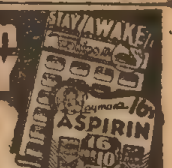

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STATEMENT OF THE OWNERSHIP, MANAGEMENT, CIRCULATION, ETC., REQUIRED BY THE ACTS OF CONGRESS OF AUGUST 24, 1912, AND MARCH 3, 1933, of Rio Kid Western, published bimonthly at New York, N. Y., for October 1, 1946. State of New York, County of New York, ss. Before me, a Notary Public in and for the State and county aforesaid, personally appeared H. L. Herbert, who, having been duly sworn according to law, deposes and says that he is the Business Manager of Rio Kid Western, and that the following is, to the best of his knowledge and belief, a true statement of the ownership, management, etc., of the aforesaid publication for the date shown in the above caption, required by the Act of August 24, 1912, as amended by the Act of March 3, 1933, embodied in section 537, Postal Laws and Regulations, printed on the reverse of this form, to wit: 1. That the names and addresses of the publisher, editor, managing editor, and business manager are: Publisher, Better Publications, Inc., 10 East 40th Street, New York, N. Y.; Editor, G. B. Farnum, 10 East 40th Street, New York, N. Y.; Managing Editor, None; Business Manager, H. L. Herbert, 10 East 40th Street, New York, N. Y. 2. That the owner is: Better Publications, Inc., 10 East 40th Street, New York, N. Y.; N. L. Pines, 10 East 40th Street, New York, N. Y. 3. That the known bondholders, mortgagees, and other security holders owning or holding 1 per cent or more of total amount of bonds, mortgages, or other securities are: None. 4. That the two paragraphs next above, giving the names of the owners, stockholders, and security holders, if any, contain not only the list of stockholders and security holders as they appear upon the books of the company but also, in cases where the stockholder or security holder appears upon the books of the company as trustee or in any other fiduciary relation, the name of the person or corporation for whom such trustee is acting, is given; also that the said two paragraphs contain statements embracing affiant's full knowledge and belief as to the circumstances and conditions under which stockholders and security holders who do not appear upon the books of the company as trustees, hold stock and securities in a capacity other than that of a bona fide owner; and this affiant has no reason to believe that any other person, association, or corporation has any interest direct or indirect in the said stock, bonds, or other securities than as so stated by him. H. L. HERBERT, Business Manager. Sworn to and subscribed before me this 1st day of October, 1946. Eugene Wechsler, Notary Public. My commission expires March 30, 1948.

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son squarely, belligerently. "I'm tearin' this whole range apart. I'll put the torch to every Thurman spread in the valley and throw my gun sights on every one of the breed I see. Fire and guns'll teach 'em a lesson they won't forget."

"Yuh put yoreself outside the law," Tom said doggedly. "Yuh make you and yores no better than any gun-hung renegade on the Box T payroll. I forbid it, Paw."

"You forbid it!" Ike thundered and looked at his son in amazement. Then suddenly he laughed, and the sound wasn't pleasant. "I swear, yuh're throwin' in with the Thurmans."

"That's a lie!" Tom blazed, then spread his hands wide in a pleading gesture. "I'm lawman of Happy Valley, Paw. I've got to do my duty no matter what happens. Yuh can see that. Right now I aim to arrest Bob Thurman, Zack Cody, and some of that breed for the night's work. If yuh take yore G Bar hands on a raid—well, I'll have to stand by my badge."

"Abe Thurman is judge," Ike answered Tom's plea. "Yuh've arrested Thurmans before for starting trouble in Paradise when both Abe and me agreed the town was to be neutral. Yuh've arrested some of our kin for the same thing. Abe releases his blood and punishes ours. What do yuh think he'll do to Bob or Zack, or any of them gunslingers? He'll let 'em go, and yuh know it."

"But I—" Ike's weary gesture stopped Tom's swift rush of words.

"A time comes when a man has to make a choice," the old rancher said. "Yuh're either for us or yuh're against us. Yuh're a Gordon or yuh ain't. Yuh got a few days to think it over, Tom. I'm hiring gunslinger for gunslinger to match the Thurmans. Then I aim to hit 'em so hard they'll never forget. Yuh got until then."

"Ike," the Rio Kid said quietly, "yuh can't have peace the way yuh're headed. This thing can go on and on unless someone stops first. The Thurmans have raided yuh, and you strike back. They'll retaliate again and then yuh'll try to pay 'em back. That way, how can this trouble end?"

"What would yuh have me do?" Ike answered angrily.

"Give Tom and me a chance. We wear the law badges. Call off yore raid. Send word to Abe Thurman that yuh're callin' a truce and let the law settle it."

"And forget the Gordons that they've killed!" Ike demanded. "Forget the four boys that was cut down tonight! Yuh expect me to do that!"

"Revenge never made any man live in peace with others or with himself," the Rio Kid said quietly. "Sure, it's hard to do, but it's the only way, Ike. If yuh carry out yore raids yore outside the law yoreself."

"Pryor, yuh was my captain when we was fightin' against the South and I figured yuh had good sense. I welcomed yuh here and yuh burned powder for me last night."

"I will again," said the Rio Kid, "so long as yuh stay inside the law. But if yuh start to raidin', I'll fight yuh and throw yuh in jail like I would any renegade."

Ike drew up swiftly. He turned to the door and flung it open, and his voice was like thunder

when he called out into the yard to his G Bar hands.

"Ride him to Paradise. If yuh see him on G Bar land, treat him like yuh would any Thurman."

The Rio Kid stiffened, anger showing in his face. Celestino Mireles moved to his side, but Pryor made a slight negative gesture.

"Ike, yuh're makin' a mistake. Yuh might need the Federal law on yore side mighty bad sometime—maybe soon."

"Then I'll abide with it. No one wanted any more law'n what we got in Happy Valley. We settle our own fights in our own way and thank yuh to keep out of it. Yuh'll use yore law badge to block me, Pryor, by callin' my men up into a law court where Abe Thurman presides. That makes yuh dangerous to me and mine. Rattle yore hocks toward Paradise."

"Abe Thurman will try no man I arrest," the Rio Kid said. "An impartial judge will handle the matter at Tucson. Thurmans will face the same bench of justice."

"Sounds mighty fine," Ike said with an angry sneer. "But all the while Thurmans keep salivatin' my kin, the Federal lawyers will be diggin' through dusty books to prove the Gordons is in the wrong. Yuh talk nonsense, Pryor. Get out of Happy Valley."

"I don't run, Ike. Yuh know that."

"Then change yore ways this time, Cap'n. Ride out!"

Ike gave a final signal to his men and the Rio Kid shrugged, moving toward the door. Celestino followed. Tom Gordon stood irresolute. He looked pleadingly at his father and then slowly and with heavy feet followed the Rio Kid out into the yard.

This excerpt gives you just a glimpse into the reading treasures in store for you in GUNS OF HAPPY VALLEY, by Lee E. Wells, featured in the next issue of RIO KID WESTERN. It's a novel that will keep you wide awake even after a hard day. It's a colorful, gun-spewing chronicle of a bitter and bloody Western range war, packed with action thrills from start to finish! Look forward to a grand yarn!

Another fine Broken Bow story, BLIND MAN'S BLUFF, by L. Ernenwein, will also be found in the next issue. Old Sheriff Sam Odegarde, whose eyes are not as sharp as they've once been, discovers the true value of friendship when he faces a crooked gambler and his gunman aide. It's a story

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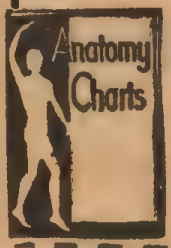

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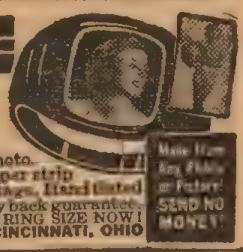

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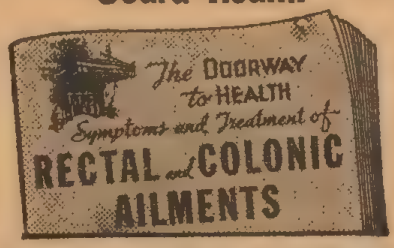

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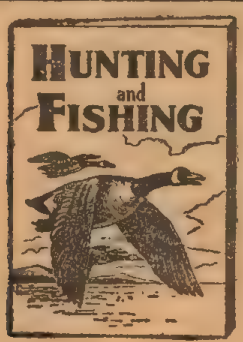

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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

THE old mail bag is really chock-full this month and we certainly appreciate and value your fine response, readers! Keep 'em coming, pards, as yours are the voices which guide the future policy of the magazine. If enough of you don't like a certain type of story, we'll stop publishing that type. And vice versa, of course, for the ones you find particularly entertaining.

Now for some excerpts from a few of your letters:

As a steady reader of RIO KID WESTERN, I think Dean Owen is your best author. His story, CROWN FOR AZORA, in the July issue, was swell. Authors Tom Curry and Lee E. Wells are good, also. I think your covers are too much alike, though. The novels vary with each issue, however most of them seem to be laid in the Southwest. How about a Northern adventure with the Rio Kid?—*Herman S. King, Wolf Creek, W. Va.*

I like the RIO KID WESTERN stories very much, but think that the book would be even more interesting if you had Captain Bob Pryor get into more fist fights. I have been reading Western stories for three years and think the RIO KID WESTERN magazine the best of the lot.—*Don Craft, Reed, Okla.*

Of all the stories I've read in RIO KID WESTERN, I liked none better than CROWN FOR AZORA. Like everyone else, though, I think Celestino Mireles should have a more important part in your long novels. I'm the youngest in our family, a cowgirl, and can ride bucking horses better than my older brother and sister, if I do say so.—*Tex Shav, Pawhuska, Okla.*

Nice ridin', Tex. But tell us, how is it they call an Oklahoman "Tex"?

I am another Rio Kid fan. Of all Western magazines, I think THE RIO KID WESTERN is the very top one. I'd like to see more of Celestino Mireles, though.—*Joyce Brewer, Hohenwald, Tennessee.*

I always read THE RIO KID WESTERN and among all the novels I've read, I liked ON TO CHEYENNE, by Tom Curry, best. How about Wyatt Earp or Billy the Kid's life in the Bunkhouse department?—*Keith Titterington, Calgary, Alberta, Canada.*

Stick around, Keith. Wyatt Earp's coming up in the next issue.

I enjoy all the Bob Pryor stories. Keep women and romance out of the Rio Kid's life, please. I think Celestino Mireles is grand.—*Everett L. Stedman, Terre Haute, Ind.*

GOLDEN CONQUEST, by Dean Owen, in the February 1945 issue, was the first Rio Kid story I ever read and I have been reading them ever since. I think the Rio Kid and Celestino are tops. CROWN FOR AZORA was one of the best stories I've ever read and, incidentally, was also written by Dean Owen. The author Dean Owen —tell him to keep writing 'em.—*Lloyd Nevin, Peoria, Ill.*

They seem to like you pretty fine this month, Dean. Take a bow! And don't worry about him keeping on writing 'em, Lloyd. We'll handcuff him to his typewriter, if necessary.

Dad and I both like RIO KID WESTERN very much. We particularly like the famous men included in the stories, such as General Grant and the many others. We'd like to see more about Saber, the Rio Kid's horse, in the stories. I like the RIO KID WESTERN and TEXAS RANGERS better than any other Western magazines. Keep up the good work.—*Kelly Thome, Olds, Alberta, Canada.*

I've been reading RIO KID WESTERN for a year and think it's the best Western magazine anyone could buy. I also like the historical characters in it. Why not put Wild Bill Hickok in sometime?—*Eddie Woodall, Hamlin, W. Va.*

That's all for this issue, pards. Thanks again for all your fine suggestions and opinions. Though most of your letters seemed filled with bouquets this time, we'll print your brickbats, too, if perchance some of you readers don't like the kind of stuff we've been publishing in the magazine.

Just drop a card or letter to The Editor, THE RIO KID WESTERN, 10 East 40th Street, New York 16, N. Y. We'll be glad to hear from you. Though we can only hope to quote from a very few of your letters, every communication received is carefully studied —whether selected for inclusion in this department or not. We're grateful for each and every one of them.

So long, folks, until next time.

—THE EDITOR.

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THE COURTING OF KATE

(Continued from page 75)

O'Shea became aware of Kate's grip on his arm. "Please, oh please, let Jeff live!" he heard her whisper.

For a moment then, as the guns continued to blast, Shaemus O'Shea stood undecided. If Blake died out there in the rubbish-littered yard there might be a good chance of marrying this sweet-faced woman who had called him the nicest man she had ever known. But Jeff Blake had saved him from a sure pistol-whipping and possible shooting only this afternoon. A man couldn't forget that, even if it meant losing his chance to court Kate Finucane.

"I know a way to save Jeff—if he's still alive," Shaemus said quickly.

Hastily elbowing his way through the excited crowd that thronged Main Street, O'Shea entered his saloon, ran quickly down the dark barroom and unlocked the rear door. Almost at once Blake came sliding through the dark doorway.

"Thought yuh'd forgot to unlock it," he panted.

"I remembered just in time," O'Shea muttered, and led Blake into a small bedroom where a low-turned bracket lamp cast a frugal glow. "Make yourself comfortable while I fetch us a bottle."

When Shaemus returned to the room Blake had placed the lamp on the floor at the foot of the bed so there would be no telltale silhouette on the window curtain.

"I'll have to watch close from now till daylight," he said, "so's I'll be in shape to arrest Halliday tomorrow."

O'Shea nodded, and poured Blake a brimming drink.

"Confusion to our enemies," he offered.

And because Shaemus kept thinking of good reasons for additional toasts, they drank to Tay O'Shea, king of the Black O'Sheas, to Parable Plunkett whom Shaemus proclaimed the best medico west of Kansas City, to Close-Shave Pelky, Sheriff Sam Odegarde and Dude Mulqueen, and finally to Kate Finucane.

"Katy—the queen of thim all," Shaemus reflected, his voice thick with Bourbon and throbbing with sentiment. "The shweetest lady thish side of Killarney, begorrah!"

Blake downed his drink, saying nothing.

" 'Tis the puzzle of me life that ye quit Katy like ye did, Jeff," Shaemus declared. "And ye so shweet on her in Dodge City. Though I'm not complainin' about it at all, at all. But I cannot undershtand why ye did it—and that ye should pass her by so when ye meet her here on the shtreet."

Jeff Blake was as near drunk now as he had ever been. And he was feeling more fraternal than he had felt in years, as he sprawled comfortably back on the bed.

"I didn't quit Kate," he said. "She's the one that quit. She ran off while I faced a trio of toughs—didn't even wait to see if I lived or died."

"Oh, she did, did she?" Shaemus demanded.

Blake nodded, and instantly an expression of righteous indignation came to O'Shea's apple-cheeked face.

"Well now, Mishter Blue Blake," he declared wrathfully, "I'll have ye know that Kate Finucane ish not that kind of a colleen!"

Blake shrugged, not seeming to care one

[*Turn page*]

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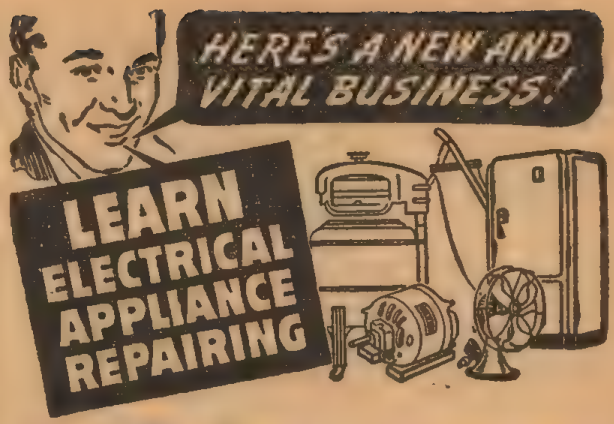

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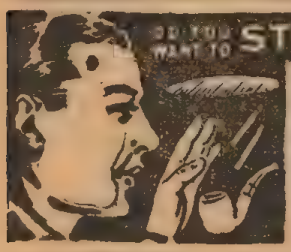

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way or the other. But O'Shea's ire was fully aroused and resentment goaded him mightily.

"'Tis a shcandalous lie!" he blurted. "A shameful, lie if iver I heard one!"

"What's a lie?" Blake asked, more asleep than awake.

"Now don't ye try to crawl out of it," Shaemus warned. "With me own ears I heard ye say it." He put down his glass and stepped unsteadily toward the bed. "I'll have ye know she's too good for the likes of ye, Jeff Blake!" he declared.

BLAKE merely looked at him in blank-eyed puzzlement, O'Shea leaned over.

"Shtand up on yer feet and fight, ye lyin' shpalpeen!" he ordered angrily.

"Yuh're drunk," Blake said, and casually waved the Irishman away, not reckoning with the fact that there was a brimming glass of Bourbon in his hand.

The whisky sloshed into O'Shea's rage-reddened face. It brought a bull-toned roar from his throat. Half-blinded by the smarting liquid, he struck at Blake, missed, and fell across him on the bed.

Blake endeavored to squirm free, but O'Shea's weight pinned him securely. All he could do was turn his head as Shaemus clumsily prepared to slug him.

"I'll learn ye some proper manners, Mishter Blake!" O'Shea promised. "I'll learn ye to reshpect Kate Finucane, who saved yer bacon that night in Dodge City."

"What did she have to do with it?" Blake asked.

Shaemus O'Shea stared down at him in bug-eyed astonishment.

"Be ye actin' cute," he demanded, "or don't ye know?"

"Know what?" Blake asked.

Shaemus sighed. He lowered his ponderous right fist and removed his left arm from Blake's chest. He eased off the bed

NEXT ISSUE'S NOVEL

•

THE RIO KID

in

GUNS OF HAPPY VALLEY

By LEE E. WELLS

and stood unsteadily while Blake sat up.

"So ye never knew it was Kate who sent Ed Masterson runnin' to shtand beside ye that night in the Alamo," he said then in a voice gone mild and mellow.

Blake shook his head. For a long moment, while comprehension seeped slowly through his whisky-fogged mind, Blake stared at O'Shea in squinty-eyed silence.

"Are yuh shore, Shaemus?" he finally asked.

"Shure and I'm shure," O'Shea told him. Then remembering how Kate had run to fetch Blake this afternoon, he added: "Just like she sent you to side me."

"I feel lower than snake sign in a wheel rut," Jeff Blake said softly.

"Aw, come now," Shaemus consoled. "'Tis me that should feel like a shnake, misjudgin' ye so and tryin' to court Kate meself." He picked up the bottle and joined Blake on the bed. "Let's me and you get drunk," he suggested.

But Jeff Blake shook his head.

"I've got some delayed courtin' to do," he said. And he did.

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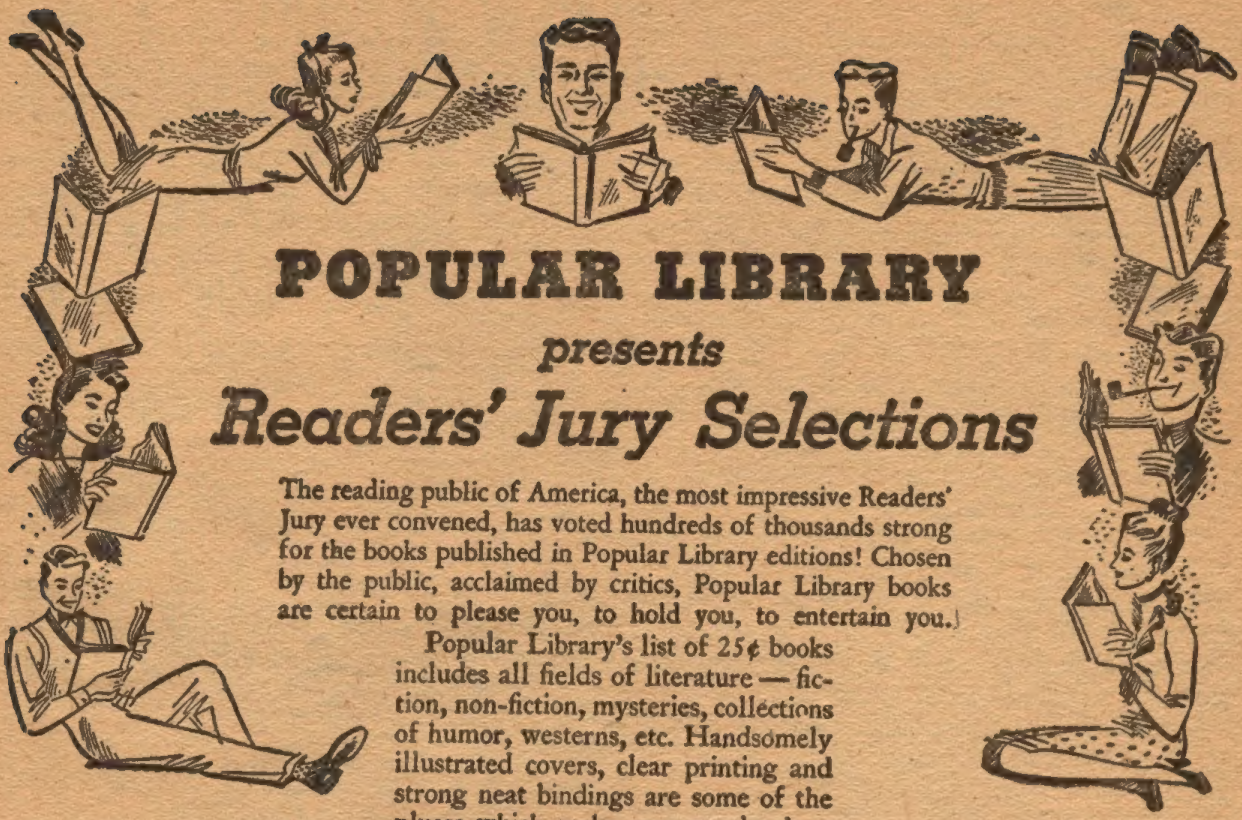

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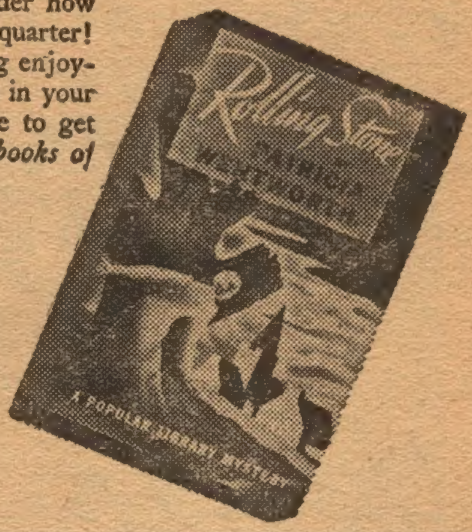

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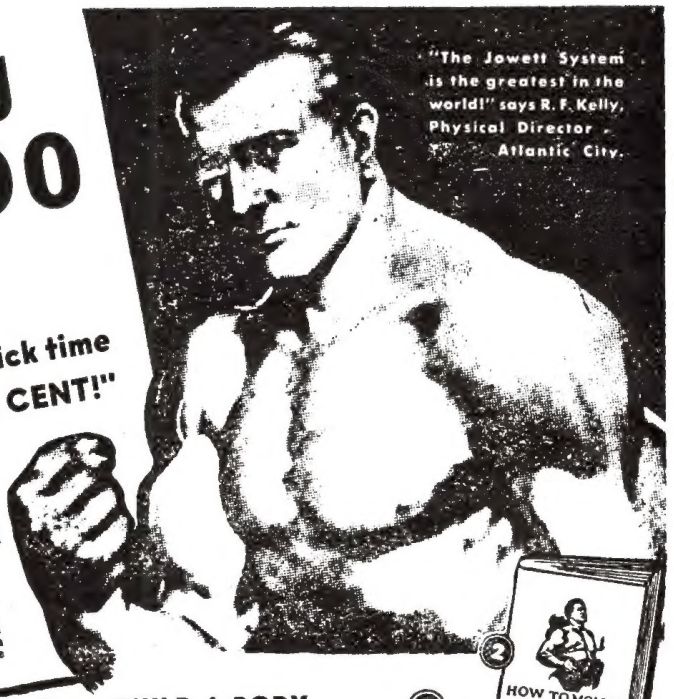

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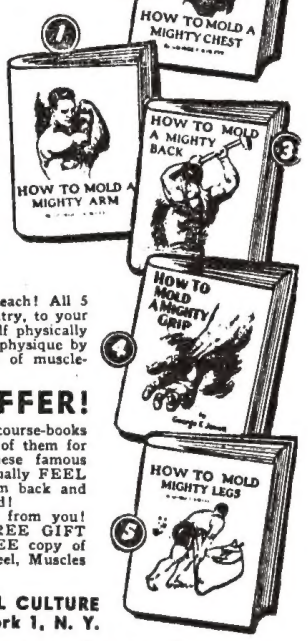

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